

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

**OU\_218644**

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



OUP-880-5-8-74-10,000.

**OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

Call No. 923.257

Accession No. 23525

Author V694K

Title

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

---



# The Woman Who Swayed America

# Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

*by*

R. L. KHIPPLE, M.A.

This is a biography of a Great Daughter of India who has dedicated her life to the cause of the Indian people.

Her whirlwind tour in America against a team of British propagandists, advocating the case of her country before the outside world is an outstanding contribution to the cause of India.

LION PRESS - LAHORE

**'FIRST EDITION, JULY 1946**

**PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY S. A. LATIF AT THE LION PRESS  
HOSPITAL ROAD, LAHORE**

*Dedicated to*

**Mrs. VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT AND  
OTHER BRAVE WOMEN OF INDIA  
WHO HAVE WORKED AND SUFFERED  
FOR THE FREEDOM OF THEIR  
MOTHERLAND**





## PREFACE

In the queer socio-ethical order of Indian life, wherein at every step one stumbles at moral *Dos* and *Donts*, and wherein countless external limitations and internal inhibitions stifle the very urge for living, few women get access to the most precious ends of life—freedom and education. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit is one of the few who had that access, and is one of the fewer still who dedicated their learning and resources to the cause of the society.

She, with other Nehrus and political leaders of India, has incessantly striven for the emancipation of 400 million souls of India, and like others has had her share of suffering in this connection. Her services to the Motherland are varied and many; and her whirlwind tour in America, at a time when India needed patriots, against a team of British hirlings, who could advocate

her case before the outside world, stands out from the rest of her contributions to the cause of India.

Whereas it may look a eulogetic narration of the praise-worthy deeds of a Great Daughter of India, the point aimed at in writing this biographical sketch is that her life should serve as a model to other educated women of India; especially those who are in favourable circumstances, having ability, leisure and resources for social works.

Indian masses are poor, illiterate and ignorant. They are the slaves of a class of foreign autocrats, and no less of the internal capitalists and the 'defenders of the faith'. Their slavery is manifolded. There is a circle within a circle. The condition of Indian women is still worse. They are the slaves of slaves. India needs an army of Lakshmis to tear asunder the layers of slavery. I wish the educated and rich women of India discard away the world of rouge and balls, and come forward to feel and work for their country, especially for the womenfolk living therein.

Let the Indian parents not keep their daughters shackled in the four walls of the *Zenana*s. Give them education, give them freedom, and goad them on to serve the nation.

In my zeal to eulogise Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, I might have inadvertently projected certain qualities around her person which actually may not be there; and on the other hand are possibilities of my having neglected or omitted some prominent details of her life. Any such discrepancy, if detected, may be attributed to the inevitable limitations of human observation, and I implore Mrs. Pandit and the readers to consider it generously.

LAHORE :

R. L. KHIPPLE.

*26th May, 1946.*



## CONTENTS

### *Part I*

HER CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE	-	-	11'
' METAMORPHOSIS ' OF THE NEHRU FAMILY	-		24
ON MAHADEV DESAI'S RECOMMENDATION !	-		30
LEADER IN THE MAKING	-	-	34
IN THE MINISTER'S CHAIR	-	-	41
ON THE FLOOR OF THE ' HOUSE '	-	-	57
STORMY DAYS OF 1942	-	-	67
WHIRLWIND TOUR IN AMERICA	-	-	74
ADDRESS TO THE CALIFORNIAN LEGISLATURE	-		96
' RESTLESS INDIA '	-	-	104

### *Part II*

CONFLICT OF DUTIES	-	-	-	115
CHARM AND VIGOUR COMBINED	-	-		122
ON WOMEN	-	-	-	128
ON EAST AND WEST	-	-	-	149
TO THE STUDENTS	-	-	-	154
JAWAHAR—A BROTHER, FRIEND AND GUIDE	-			158
HALF-AN-HOUR IN ANAND BHAWAN	-	-		165



# PART I





*“The world has had enough of injustice, enough of hunger and misery, and all those things that drag a man’s soul to the very gates of despair and tragedy, and from every corner of the globe comes the cry to demolish a structure which allows such things to be, and to replace it by something new based on the principles of truth, fair play and justice.”*

*—Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit*



## **Her Childhood and Adolescence**

The times were not turbulent or stormy in the phenomenal sense, and yet it was a fateful period in the political history of India, for it was then that many of the knottiest problems, which now stare us in the face, had begun taking root, slowly and imperceptibly.

'Britannia' was triumphantly 'ruling the waves,' the ring of slavery had already been tightened around the body politic of India and the idea of 'divide and rule' had already occurred to and successfully tried by the Whiteman. The Indian Nation had long slumbered like an opium-eater. The sudden, jerky midnight wake-up of the year 1857—the so-called 'Mutiny'—had again been quietened into a stupor. The British diplomats administered morphia injections and Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India sang pleasant lullabies.

There had however been enough of sleeping and the 'baby' had begun to yawn.

The Indian National Congress, founded in the year 1883 by the late Allan Octavian Hume with a view 'to ventilate and espouse the cause of the suffering masses and to chalk out ways and means for their emancipation,' had lived full 16 years of its life. It had however till then remained just a sort of semi-loyal lukewarm society, 'accepting in a loyal spirit' the baits and the crumbs thrown by shrewd British diplomats every now and then and 'thanking the Government for its liberal spirit' in giving effect to some trivial constitutional measures occasionally. Minor questions like the inclusion of Indians in higher Government services, etc., were engaging its attention, and it had not evolved into a revolutionary organization as it is today.

The previous year an expedition had been sent to South Africa, and the former Boer Republics were being incorporated in the British Dominions. Before the summer of the year was half way through crisis occurred in China and Lord Curzon was called upon to equip and despatch an expeditionary force to assist in coping with the situation there.

The Imperial Russian Government had made repeated attempts at diplomatic contacts with Afghanistan, and Russian activity across the border line in the North was therefore aggravating Lord Curzon's chronic insomnia trouble.

And above all a terrible famine was staring India in the face, for although summer was wearing on there was absolutely no sign of rain. This alarming prospect dragged Lord Curzon from the breezy atmosphere of Naldehra in the Simla hills to the famine-threatened areas.

'By a curious coincidence his visits to the various centres were accompanied by a revival of the monsoon, and from the moment the disaster with which India was threatened was averted.'

It was just then, on the 18th August, 1900, that Swarup Kumari Nehru or Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, as she is known today, was born at Allahabad.

Whether it was Lord Curzon's visit to the famine-threatened areas or Swarup Kumari Nehru's descending on earth, which brought rains, will probably ever remain a

contestable point between the loyals and the patriots.

Her father—the late Pandit Motilal Nehru, of revered memory,—at the time of her birth was renowned just for his legal learning and aristocratic life. ~

To pester the readers with long, monotonous pedigree details of the family wherein she was born would be just superfluous, for the Nehrus are known not only all over India, but in the four corners of the world.

At the time when Vijaya Lakshmi came in this world Jawaharlal, her elder brother, was about 11 years old. The birth of a sister—a ‘domestic event’ as he in his own innocent way calls it, absorbed his attention, for he had long nourished a secret grievance at not having any brothers or sisters when everybody else seemed to have them, and the prospect of having at least a baby brother or sister all to himself was exhilarating. “I remember waiting anxiously in the verandah for the ‘event.’ One of the doctors came and told me of it and added, presumably as a joke, that I must be glad that it was not a boy who would have taken a share in my

patrimony. I felt bitter and annoyed at the thought that any one should imagine that I could harbour such a vile notion," thus he recalls the event in one of his writings.

She was born not with a silver but a diamond spoon in her mouth for her father had earned distinction, name and wealth, and the costliest luxuries of life were available in the family at the mere asking. The family members called her 'Swarup'. She was extremely lovely and was therefore 'made much of' in the family, for any one so beautiful as she was should naturally become a darling of the family. She was, however, a spoilt darling of the family.

At that time her father had the costliest dogs, cars and carriages. As he was himself very fond of hunting, and being a very fine horseman had many horses of good breed in his stable, he also bought ponies to the children; and Swarup thus, with other children of the family, learnt to ride almost as soon as she was able to walk.

At a very early age—when she was just 4½ years old, she accompanied her father and mother on a voyage to Europe when they

also paid a visit to Bed Ems in Germany where Jawaharlal Nehru was at the time undergoing a cure.

It was then that her father kept her a European governess—Miss Hooper—who is described to be a very fine governess with extremely good qualifications and came from a very good family. She was in fact brought up in many respects, like an only child. Spoilt sons are in abundance but a spoilt daughter is a rarity in India. Friends of the family therefore, especially those with orthodox view-points, expressed their anxieties and predicted difficulties for her.

One day when she was a small girl, a rich client of her father, who saw her going out for a ride, was much perturbed. Why, he asked her father, was it necessary for her to have that freedom, to be in the charge of an English governess and to be educated as if she were a boy; and speaking in his village dialect he asked with deep concern '*Ka nannhi bibi ka ukalat nama dakhil kare, ka hai.*' The old gentleman's vision like that of others of his age and generation was limited. No doubt he was fond of her, but as he knew that



she would be married in some rich and aristocrat family, she would have plenty of leisure and wealth. Where was therefore the necessity for her to labour on her books? According to his conception studies were necessary only to enable one to earn his or her living and when living was secure, there was no need to labour!

Years have passed when the old man, referred to, gave the above remarks, but even today there still lingers on a class of orthodox men and women—mostly old—who do not look upon the education of women with favour. And she envisages the same outlook while she observes thus “Today, as I sit in the Legislative Assembly, I see the son of the old gentleman, who criticized my method of education, sitting opposite to me. He has, I am afraid, not progressed with the times and I have a suspicion that he disapproves of me in the new role (of a minister) just as his father did in the past.”

Her father, the late Pandit Motilal Nehru, too, during those days, did not approve of the idea of his children going to school. The necessary qualifications for a

young lady in those days were to learn how to play the piano or some other musical instrument, and be able to carry on a conversation and mix well in society and to have regular lessons from a tutor, preferably a lady teacher (who were then rather scarce) within the four walls of the house. Swarup, therefore, in deference to the wishes of her father, and in conformity with the conventions of the aristocracy of the days, did not go to any school, and was given a home education, which her parents thought would suit the future to which she was believed by them to be destined. The future planned for her at the time was the same old, conventional 'home kitchen and children' affair, only with a little more leisure, and a little more wealth, and higher status in society; and who could possibly at that time imagine that she would one day sit in the chair of the Minister for Local Self-Government of her province, and would take America by storm in the presentation of India's case to the people therein, and all else she did in her life. As referred to herebefore, her parents engaged for her a resident European gover-

ness who took her out and looked to her other personal needs. Besides the governess, for various subjects a team of masters was employed who came up one after the other in turn and bored the little girl to a stubborn nausea.

There was a clock-like regularity in her childhood life. In the morning she was taken out for a ride on 'a very beautiful white pony with a long tail' and was made to ride round a ring which had been specially made in the grounds of the palatial building now called Swaraj Bhawan, under the instructions of a riding master.

Lessons, play and other activities went on with strict regularity under the careful supervision of the governess and teachers in the spacious and beautiful gardens of their magnificent residence. Every year summer was spent in the hills and life was sheltered and secure but uneventful, if not dull.

In spite of the apparent atmosphere of the West enjoyed by her, there was quite a big number of 'dents' in her life. She, for example, seldom saw cinema, as films were strictly prohibited by her governess.

During those days she also developed intense passion for dancing—at this time her age was about 15 years. The passion, however, was ‘nipped in the bud’ by her governess and parents.

As her father in the meantime had come in the political lime-lights of the times, his house was the meeting place of all the eminent personalities of India. It was she who used to entertain them at the meetings with other members of the family, and thus at a very early age—when she was a little more than 15, she came in contact with all those great men and women of India whom an average person would covet to see.

In 1915 she accompanied her father to the Annual Session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay.

“Congress in 1915,” she tells us, “was a stylish affair. One wore one’s prettiest clothes and had a good time meeting people from other parts of India and going to parties.”

She was, however, then too young to understand the political significance of the occasion.

To the great misfortune (or perhaps relief) of the children of the Nehru family during this time Miss Hooper, their governess, after twelve long years of service, fell in love with an English young man, whom she later on married. By that time however Swarup had become 17 years in age and perhaps no more needed a governess.

In 1919 came the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh and the contact of the Nehrus with Mahatma Gandhi. From thence onwards begins the history of the 'conversion' of the Nehru family and as such, of the 'conversion' of Vijaya Lakshmi too. She had till then been carefully sheltered from the world of struggle, the world of misery, the world that is 'out there' in India. It was then that she was awakened to the truths of life that brought about a remarkable change in her outlook. The world of European governesses, of the pony rides, of breezy hill stations, of pleasant sea voyages was saying good-bye for ever and up there was staring in her eyes a grim and sad reality—the reality of the bondage of starving millions of India, the reality of the horrible tales of repression and

tyranny let loose by a foreign government on innocent 'natives' of the land.

Before that who could possibly prophesy that the magic wand of the personality of a 'little man in loin-cloth' would bring about such a drastic change in the family. Who knew that the aristocrat, Bohemian Kashmiri Pandits would, by a sudden turn of events, transform into unflinching patriots who would sacrifice their comforts, health, wealth and even their lives for the cause of their motherland. And who could possibly foresee that that extremely beautiful little girl (and on that account a pampered child of the family), they named Swarup, would one day develop into a woman of the calibre and ability of now Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to shine on the horizon of Indian politics like a star.

The coming in touch with the Nehru family of the political wizard of India—Mahatma Gandhi—ushered a new era, not only in the life of the Nehru family but also in the political history of India—"Naturally I fell under his magic spell and co-operated joyfully in helping to complete the change in

our life, which had begun with his entrance into the family," she writes.

## **‘Metamorphosis’ of the Nehru Family**

As has already been pointed out in the meantime under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi the family had begun drifting towards practical politics more and more. In the year 1919 Gandhiji went over to Allahabad to have some important discussions with her father, the late Pandit Motilal Nehru. The ghastly shootings of the Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar had left deep impressions on the mind of Pandit Motilalji and he contemplated plunging in politics head and ears, for that was the need of the time. Before that he had been more of an arm-chair theorist than a practical politician but the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy changed his outlook and he realized that in a country like India, so completely in bondage of a terroristic foreign bureaucracy known in the world for their diplomacy, an arm-chair politician could not make much way.



Jawaharlal Nehru, who had come back from England in the year 1912, was devoting more and more time to politics, and the emancipation of the teeming millions of India was engaging his entire attention. It is said that the late Pandit Motilal Nehru was a little precautious in life, and but for Jawaharlal's dashing ways and unflinching determination, he would have probably remained a moderate in Indian politics. In the beginning Motilalji is even said to have advised Jawaharlal to beware of his ultra-radical ways in politics and not to court arrest, for arrest in those days was more fearful than it is now. In the beginning there is also said to have ensued a clash of political ideologies between the father and the son, which in fact was the natural clash between Youth and Age, or if we go a little deeper it was probably father's unfathomable love for his only son, which goaded him again and again to dissuade the fiery young man from the stormy and dangerous path of Indian politics. Referring to this painful period of the father-son controversy, Jawaharlal's sister Krishna Hutheesingh writes in her reminiscences, " For

many days a conflict took place in both Jawahar's and father's minds. There were long discussions and sometimes heated words. Both spent tortured days and nights trying each in his own way to convince the other. Father was distressed at Jawahar's determination to follow Bapu. We discovered later that he used to try sleeping on the floor to find out what it felt like, for he felt that that was what Jawahar would have to do in jail. These were most unhappy days for all of us." It was however the dashing energy and determination of the son, which held itself up, and father's love gave way. Nay, in addition it did something more. Father's devotion for his son dragged the latter more and more in active politics. The happenings in the Punjab, with the gruesome massacre of innocent Indians at Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar, brought father round to his son's way of thinking. The new bent of mind turned into a firm conviction in the creed of satyagraha, and he decided to throw in his lot with Jawahar and follow Gandhi. He gave up his legal practice in the Allahabad High Court and made up his mind to devote

whole of his time to the cause of India's freedom. Thus there came a period which may truly be called the period of the 'metamorphosis of the Nehru family'. Pandit Motilal Nehru had earned millions and millions and had also spent lavishly, never hoarding up money for a rainy day. When he gave up practice they immediately had to bring about certain changes in the household, as it was not possible to live as they had been doing with no income at all. The first thing he did was to sell his horses and carriages. Then he had to dismiss quite a few of the army of servants he had, and curtail expenses in every direction. There were no more banquets; only one cook instead of two or three, and no more smart butlers with numerous bearers or their satellites. All their lovely Dresden and Venetian China and glass and many other articles, both expensive and beautiful, were sold off.

The story goes that when Pandit Motilal Nehru had given up practice at the bar an old client of his came and offered him a lac of rupees if he agreed to take up his case as a special case. Looking at his younger

daughter sitting by the side Panditji said, "Well, Beti! do you think it would be right for me to accept this case?" The daughter hesitated for a minute and then with mustered up courage said, "No, father, I don't think you should." Father gave his daughter a quick clasp and sent the client away with regrets. Needless to say that Pandit Motilal required money those days rather badly.

In 1920 Gandhiji started his satyagraha movement. Both the father and the son joined the movement and were hauled up in the foreign bureaucracy's campaign of wholesale arrests, and convicted. After that it became quite a habit with the police to raid the premises of Anand Bhawan. Every time they came they attached some valuable pieces of furniture for a petty sum of fine. It did not hurt their conscience at all to take away a carpet worth several thousands along with other things when all they had to realise was just five hundred rupees.

Vijaya Lakshmi had till then been almost a silent spectator of the turn of events in the family. The change, however, was not in

any way embarrassing to her, as in the natural course, it should have been to a 'spoilt child to aristocracy'. Instead of frustration she developed vigour and determination. It appears as if her sub-conscious mind was all along that time preparing itself for the coming events, for when the tide came, she adjusted herself, and adjusted with such dexterity, as if she was born for those later roles.

## **On Mahadev Desai's Recommendation**

It was the year 1920, when one fine morning the late 'Sjt. Mahadev Desai—Mahatma Gandhi's devoted Private Secretary—came up to Anand Bhawan and asked Vijaya Lakshmi to read an article in the *Modern Review*, which was written by a dear friend of his, whom he described to her as 'most brilliant and very lovable' young man. The article was entitled 'At the Feet of the Guru' and the name of the writer was Ranjit Pandit, who was, as Desai described him, a most brilliant and lovable and a cultured litterateur aristocrat barrister from Kathiawar. Mahadev Desai and Ranjit Pandit had been at college together, and graduated the same year (how sad of life! both of them are now no more).

It was probably then that she came to know of Ranjit Pandit—the man to whom she was later on married.

Mr. Ranjit Pandit and Vijaya Lakshmi met each other for the first time in November, 1920.

“ Will you marry me? ” he asked. “ I have come many miles and crossed many bridges to come to you but in future you and I must cross our bridges hand in hand,” he implored. She nodded ‘ yes ’ and they were married.

As to how from a mere introduction ‘ in absentia ’ the matter hurried on to the extent that they personally met each other and agreed to ‘ cross the bridges hand in hand ’ is yet to be enquired from her. Whether or not Sjt. Mahadev Desai acted as a match-maker, is also to be ascertained.

She was married to Ranjit Pandit on the 10th May, 1921, when her age was about 21 years.

Her marriage was a very grand affair—done in the correct Kashmiri style. Mrs. Krishna Hutheesingh, her younger sister, describes that on the occasion of the ceremony there were hundreds of guests, friends and relations staying with the Nehru family, including the members of the entire

Working Committee of the Indian National Congress, which was holding one of its meetings at Allahabad. Also the local Congress workers wanted to avail of the opportunity of the presence of the top rank Congress leaders in Allahabad, and they organised a District Conference. Therefore a large number of the peasants from the surrounding villages thronged in Allahabad to attend the Conference, and the city, normally a sleepy old town, was full of activity and excitement. At the sight of that hustle and bustle, the English residents of the town were greatly alarmed as they apprehended some violent uprising. It was a strange simultaneity of events and dates—May 10th, the date fixed for the marriage of Vijaya Lakshmi, was also by coincidence the anniversary of India's first violent struggle for freedom—the uprisings of 1857.

Recalling to her mind the married life of nearly two decades, in a reminiscential radio talk, she once observed: "My children sometimes ask me what change brought a man from far Kathiawar to marry a daughter of Kashmir. To this question I have no



answer save that the chance was a lucky one ... There have been (the lines were written by her when her husband, the late Mr. Pandit, was alive) many ups and downs in our life—some of the bridges we have had to cross were shaky, they threatened to give way, but always we have gone over together, and even after 18 years (written in 1939) I can still be glad for that day in November when we met with each other.”

The birth of three children—Chandra Lekha, Nayantara and Rita Vitasta has added to the fulfilment of her life. But for the untimely death of Mr. Pandit and other occasional disruptions, which the family had to suffer for the cause of the country, in all other respects theirs was a happy, integrated home life. She has in fact delivered ‘unto God what belongs to God and unto Moses what is Moses’’. She is an extremely affectionate and kind mother and a very helping and loving wife. It has however not been possible for her to give herself to her children and husband so much as it could have been possible if her country weren’t in bondage and she too is not unconscious of this fact.

## **Leader in the Making**

Towards the end of 1925 Kamla—Jawaharlal's wife—fell seriously ill. The doctors advised her removal to some good sanatorium in Switzerland. In March, 1926, therefore, Jawaharlal sailed for Europe with his daughter and ailing wife. At the occasion Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and her husband Ranjit also accompanied them to Europe, toured the continent extensively and returned back to India with rich experience of European social life and politics.

Thereafter intervened a period during which her life was comparatively calm, easy and in a way uneventful. All along this period, all that she had read, heard and observed was getting consolidated and crystallised in her person. Imperceptibly and unconsciously, she was preparing herself for the stormy life to come.

As the late Pandit Motilal Nehru used

to tell his daughters, the patriotism was in their blood and unless they actively suppressed it, it was bound to assert itself sooner or later.

There came an opportunity—the political movement of 1931-32—for ‘the patriotism in her blood to assert itself’, and it readily did.

In December, 1931, when Gandhiji returned from England after having attended the Round Table Conference, most tumultuous scenes in the history of Indian political struggle were witnessed.

When the Mahatma set foot on the Indian soil, he was told that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his comrades had already been arrested. Here was a repressive move which precipitated the Government and the Congress towards a catastrophic conflict resulting in the Civil Disobedience Movement of the year 1932.

The fault for initiating the conflagration lay entirely with the Government.

The country was agog with fiery patriotism from one end to the other. After

Jawahar ; Gandhiji, Patel and all other big leaders of the soil were also arrested. A reign of repression and bloodshed was let loose by the bureaucracy on the Indian masses all over the country—masses whose only fault was that they demonstrated their urge to be free from the yokes of slavery, and demanded freedom for their Motherland. Arrests, lathi-charges, firings, etc., were just common occurrences of everyday life, and ordinance upon ordinance was being piled by the then Viceroy on the head of a subjugated, repressed people.

Vijaya Lakshmi responded to the call of the hour and joined the ranks of surging millions in demonstrating to the Government the resentment of the Indian people against the foreign rule. She delivered speeches, led processions and organised hartals, now here now there ; whereupon a notice was served on her, prohibiting her from taking part in the movement for a period of one month. But how could this great daughter of India 'in compliance' to a notice from His Majesty's Government keep mum and refrain from joining and helping the people in their

struggle for freedom, at such a critical period in the history of Indian political movement?

The expected happened, and she was arrested on the 27th January, 1932, along with her sister, Krishna. Thus all members of the Nehru family were in jail, except their frail little mother, who was left behind all alone and the huge house which had once known so much of joy and happiness, knew only sorrow and gloom now. She was tried and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment with fine, whereas her younger sister got the same sentence but without fine. This one year she was kept in the Lucknow jail. Her youngest child at the time was only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years old. How painful it should be for a mother to stay away from her little children for 12 long months, in jail !

The first time she had an occasion to speak in public was during this non-co-operation movement of 1932, at Allahabad, when most of the leaders had gone to jail and women were called upon to come forward and do their share, for the liberation of the country.

In one of her autobiographical narrations

she gives interesting accounts of her initial attempts at public speaking. One morning after a long procession she was asked to speak in a public meeting. "I hadn't a thought in my head and not a trace of inspiration could I get from the faces around me. It was a difficult moment . . . quite suddenly something happened . . . The crowd before me became a part of myself. We were both part of some bigger unseen forces; the message was there, it had only to be delivered. I spoke and the crowd cheered . . . I was happy in my little success. After this I was called upon to speak quite often."

For some time her experience of speaking before an audience of students was rather unfortunate for she expected them to be equipped with up-to-date information and learning and had to be a little 'scholarly' in what she said. But the intellectual sophistication brought a dull response from the unmoved faces in front. Ever since the beginning of human history, emotion has been ruling human actions almost entirely and cold reason and learning are of a very recent growth in the evolution of mankind.

One day it struck her that she should be just homely with the students and that instead of 'delivering' a speech she should informally talk to them. Ever since she has been a success with them too.

In this connection she recalls another incident, while she was invited to attend a meeting held by a Students' Union in remembrance of Maxim Gorki. Learned people came on the stage and gave complicated details of the various issues. The atmosphere was dull and superficial.

The audience coldly stared at the face of each speaker and waited for the end of the speech in expectation of another more lively. She could not restrain herself and asked for permission to speak which was readily granted. She interpreted the message of Gorki in terms which the Indian worker could follow, and soon applause bubbled out from the meeting. But after her it wasn't easy for any speaker to get a patient hearing.

In 1935 she stood up as a candidate for the Municipal Board membership in Allahabad and was elected with an over-

whelming support of votes. Her period of stay in the Board was, however, rather uneventful.

During that period she was also elected as the Chair-woman of the Education Committee of the Board in which capacity she worked for about 18 months and gathered considerable experience of the civic and educational life of the area.



## **In the Minister's Chair**

Then came the General Elections of the year 1937. She stood up as a candidate for the Provincial Assembly of the United Provinces from Cawnpore Bilhaur constituency opposing Lady Srivastava, the wife of the then Minister of Education in the U.P. Government. The country was pulsating with boisterous patriotism all over, and the Congress was scoring victory over victory everywhere. 'Previous to that my knowledge of elections had been vague and corresponded somewhat to Hyde Park oratory,' she writes. But the actual election campaign in the villages of the Cawnpore district was an eye-opener to her. She toured through the length and breadth of the country with her team, in the trains, in motor-cars, on bullock carts, and even on foot. Actual contact with the starving millions of India added to her information and greatly enriched

her understanding of social and political affairs. For her the laborious task of election propaganda was yet another thrill in her already much too bold and courageous existence. She was asked to fight a difficult seat, and as has already been pointed out her opponent in the election was the wife of the then Minister of Education of her province. But the very name Congress was enough to inspire the voters to vote for her, and to enable her to thwart any one and every one whosoever ventured to oppose her.

In one of her writings she narrates an interesting incident of those days. Travelling in her constituency she one day happened to enter a railway compartment which was already occupied by an Indian student and an American tourist. There was a hot discussion going on between them. In the meanwhile the talk turned on to elections and they began to discuss the chances of her success in the election. Neither the Indian student nor the American tourist could recognise her by their side. She therefore stood beside as an interested spectator. The American asked the Indian student what exactly she had

done to deserve such eulogising. 'Done!' the Indian student exclaimed in reply, "she does not have to do anything. She is our mother and sister, and she will win."

'Gandhi caps' were everywhere applauded by the teeming millions of the land, and the Congress swept the polls. Her constituency was a rural one consisting of about 38,000 men and women. She was elected by a majority of 10,000 votes.

The elections were over, and one fine morning in July, 1937, came a telegram from Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant asking Vijaya Lakshmi if she would join his cabinet as a Minister. She did not want to join the ministry, especially as she had already vehemently opposed the proposal of office acceptance moved by Sjt. C. Rajagopalacharya in the Congress Working Committee meeting; but the advice and counsel of those whose opinion she valued led her to accept the office. As a member of the Congress she had been trained to obey orders from those placed above her. Besides, in offering her a seat in the U. P. Cabinet, the Congress was

accepting the principle of equality between man and woman.

“ I had an exceedingly vague idea of the duties of a Minister when on the 18th July, 1937, I entered my office room in the Civil Secretariat for the first time.” A young man presented himself to her and told her that he was her Personal Assistant ; and she began to wonder as to what all that meant. The Personal Assistant, who presumably must have been well acquainted with the Secretariat practices, must have wondered at her ignorance when in a charmingly innocent way she very hesitatingly enquired from him if it was possible to remove some of the unwanted furniture from the office room. She was told that that was ‘ permissible.’

No doubt, she has lived a life full of struggle, a life otherwise brave but bespotted with intervals of gloomy days of jail existence and rough political strifes—which is the lot of every political worker in India ; nevertheless she has kept alive within her a passion for the delicacies and fineries of life. She has a highly developed sense of, and an extremely

sensitive eye for, Beauty. The æsthetic sense within her refused to be swayed by the monotony and drudgery of the jail and the red-tape automatum of the Secretariat.

In her office room in the massive Secretariat building, a 'perfectly impossible pink carpet struck a discordant note against the apple green distemper on the walls'. She stood in the doorway and surveyed the room with a sinking heart. The 'Artist' in her was hurt. The pink carpet was quickly removed and in place of that a delightful beige and bluish green one was substituted. Angle of the table was changed and a couple of blue green curtains were asked for from her home and hung in the room. And yet something still seemed lacking,—flowers—. She sent for a green 'Khurja' bowl and ordered it to be filled with roses from the Secretariat gardens.

Everybody has his or her own eccentricities, and she had hers! A green coloured carpet, curtains to match, and a bowl-full of roses all that was procured, but then there were big old and gloomy files on her

table. Life is not all 'art' and surely none else would do that 'mundane' work for her. How on earth could she tackle them? Here, her marvellous quality of taking things in a sportsmanly spirit, and of adjusting herself as and when needed, coupled with her habit of plunging into a matter downright came handy to her. She just took up a file—one that looked less complicated than the rest, and began to read. 'Soon I was engrossed in it and by the time I had read it through, I felt quite competent to pass an order'. After that she went on with greater confidence to the next file and then to the next, till by the afternoon, she had learnt the proper method of going through Secretariat files and passing orders on them.

There came a giant, six feet tall in height, Englishman, the Departmental Secretary, in her room. Good heavens! how was she to manage that giant, short as she looked in stature in front of him. In India where men claim themselves to be incontestably superior to women, for a woman who was brought up in a Kashmiri Pandit home of U.P. and had in the natural course of life imbibed all the

characteristics of Indian womanhood, it should look a little embarrassing being placed in a position wherein she was required to deal tactfully with a team of Personal Assistants, Departmental Secretaries and Parliamentary Secretaries etc., some of them being even six feet tall. Here again her indomitable courage and the strong will to live came to her rescue. She managed them all and managed very well. ✓

Immediately after she came in the limelight as a Minister, she had to undergo the ordeal—as all other public leaders do—of being interviewed.

In one of her observations she humorously refers to journalists as a pest—‘It is my opinion that the two greatest pests in the world today are the telephone and the journalist. The telephone can, however, be disconnected . . . but the journalists cannot’.

‘How is it you have accepted a seat in the Cabinet after your opposition to acceptance of office,’ asked a journalist, and irrespective of the reply that she gave or wanted to give, next day the papers announced

‘Mrs. Pandit formed to accept minister-ship . . .’

Again, while speaking at a girl students meeting she advised them not to be influenced by prejudiced persons and to resist the so-called customs etc., wherever they crippled their personality. During the speech she made a passing reference to a letter on divorce published in a certain paper. And the next day her speech was headed as ‘Mrs. Pandit supporting divorce for women.’

Her experience on being interviewed in Europe was even more disastrous. On being questioned ‘what do you think of physical culture?’ she replied ‘oh yes, I am a believer in it—specially the Indian variety’, and next day a popular daily announced ‘Woman Minister begins 18-hour day by standing on head’.

Another journalist came and asked her if her premarital acquaintance with Mr. Pandit started in the jail. In spite of her repeated corrections, that she had been 10 years married before she went to jail, next day a newspaper gave interesting but



incorrect details of her life including a fabricated romantic meeting with Mr. Pandit in jail which later on led to their marriage.

During the gay period of her ministership invitation cards piled one after the other on her table. She had an occasional glimpse of fairy lights in beautiful gardens, and witnessed tennis tournaments, and attended parties and enjoyed festivities too but all that she watched with interest as a passing pageant while her mind heard 'far away in the distance . . . the cry of the oppressed and the hungry—the cry which gains in strength and volume as hours go by'.

It moved her so much when she read about the 'rioting in Cawnpore', the 'agitation in Bandhelkhund'—and the 'tyranny let loose on Rajkot state subjects,' but it depressed her all the more when she tried to discuss the news with educated people who had not even cared to read them.

We have, however, so far dealt with only the just interesting side of her ministership period—interesting for a superficial reader for whom the events of life are only anecdotes. 'She overhauled and refurnished her room,

asked for flower pots, attended parties etc., it's all right, but surely that is not all what ministers are meant for a serious reader would exclaim with impatience and would like to know what legal and administrative changes, if any, she as a minister brought about.

She was the head of the Local Self Government Department, covering Health and Sanitation. Up to the year 1914 the administration of the Health and Sanitation Department had vested in a Sanitary Commissioner assisted by a small staff. After that the Public Health item was transferred to the local bodies and it continued to be controlled by such bodies without any appreciable help, except the casual supervision or guidance, from the Provincial Government. In 1927 the Government started recruiting officers in the Provincial Medical Service and the work of the Local Health and Sanitation units was greatly assisted.

When Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit took charge of the Department, she had several problems to tackle and many obstacles to overcome.

At many places especially in some rural areas drinking water facilities did not exist, and inhabitants of those places were rather hard-pressed for pure drinking water.

Maternity and Child Welfare facilities from the Government side were almost non-existent.

Arrangements regarding public health and sanitation were very poor, especially in the villages scattered far away from the centres of modern life. It was very difficult for the average villager to get medical relief as he had to walk many miles from his home to get the services of a doctor. The Government could not afford to open one hospital in each village, for that would be a rather costly enterprise and even if this task, impossible though it was, could be accomplished, how about the natural antipathy and prejudice of the ignorant masses against the allopathic treatment—they would rather go to a Hakim than a doctor.

Taking in view on the one hand the prejudices of the village folk and on the other the financial stringency the Government was

facing, in the budget for the year 1938-39 she presented a scheme to the House proposing opening of 300 dispensaries in the rural areas. Out of this number 200 dispensaries were to be under the charge of Indian practitioners of indigenous system of medicine—Vaid and Hakims—and 100 dispensaries under allopathic doctors. Some ultra-modern members of the House criticized the indigenous system, but convinced as she was that Ayurvedic and Unani systems of treatment also have their merits, she stuck to the scheme.

Provision of Maternity facilities was yet another task. The Indian Red Cross Society was carrying on the work of training Christian and other ladies (mostly Christians for others would not come forth for the profession), with a view to turn out midwives and nurses. In their task the Red Cross Society were given aid by the Government. The experiment, however, did not succeed. The failure of the experiment was not due to lack of zeal on her part but the prejudices of the ignorant people, as she observed in a statement in the Assembly.

"I regret to have to admit that these midwives are not at all popular, and in spite of the fact that the Red Cross Society has turned out more midwives now, who are slightly better trained and of a better social standing, still they are looked down upon with suspicion and even where these *Dais* are available, the women of that part prefer not to make use of their services.

"People must be convinced that the work of a midwife is not a work to be looked down upon, and done by the very lowest in the land but that it is honourable work . . . This sort of things can only be done by propaganda."

Apart from the grant of aid to the Indian Red Cross Society, the Medical School for Women at Agra was converted into a Nursing Centre from the 1st January, 1939. The supply of these nurses to the various hospitals proved a great asset for public health.

Under her control a concentrated Anti-malarial Scheme was prepared and the Ministry intended to spend about Rs. 80,000

with a view to combat Malaria in the places it was prevalent in the most pernicious form.

For providing drinking water in some villages where drinking water facilities did not exist Rs. 35,000 were provided for the construction of wells.

She laid great stress on the opening of play grounds and Akharas for open-air exercise in villages and towns. In 1938-39 some 45,000 rupees were sanctioned for 48 districts, and the District and Municipal Boards were requested to open play grounds and Akharas for the benefit of children and adults. 175 play grounds were opened in rural areas and 10 in the Municipal areas.

With the money sanctioned for medical aid in rural areas in 1938-39 budget, 16 Travelling Dispensaries, 48 fixed Dispensaries, 24 Maternity and Child Welfare Centres and 192 Aushadhalayas and Dawakhanas were established.

In the next budget health schemes were extended to 5 more districts and four new Anti-rabic Centres were opened. Maternity

and Child Welfare Centres were stabilised and drinking-water wells were improved upon.

She had a milk scheme in view for the children of the Province, the idea being to supply every child in Municipal and urban areas with a certain quantity of milk every evening after they had done physical exercises in the newly constructed play-grounds in both rural and urban areas. The scheme, however, had to be postponed due to financial stringency and the experiment was tried only in Agra district with some success.

In connection with her educational activities it need be specifically mentioned that during her ministership period she made a special effort to convert night schools into real adult literacy centres by striving to model evening institutions on Russian Principles of Education, adapting them to suit Indian conditions.

But for monetary stringency which the Ministry faced, she would have succeeded in maturing schemes of Public Hygiene, Maternity and Child Welfare, which would prove most beneficial to the people. What

ever little bits of funds she had at her disposal, were utilized by her most scrupulously for the public welfare.

“ We do not wish to spend a single pie of tax-payers money without fullest consideration ”, she, in clarification of her policy, once declared.



## On the Floor of the House

*"The interest of our country demands our unity in face of a common growing danger. Let us not hold back, because remember—If India dies who lives? If India lives who dies?"*  
(Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in U. P. Assembly, 1939).

On Thursday, the 29th July, 1937 at 11 a. m., the United Provinces Assembly met at the Assembly Hall, where Vijaya Lakshmi took her oath as the Minister for Local-Self Government.

Before that her knowledge of a Council in action was confined to a few occasions when as a girl she sat in the Visitors' Gallery in the Assembly Chamber in Delhi and Simla during the days when her father led the Swaraj Party Opposition in the Assembly.

Soon after the appointment came up the

day when she was to make her maiden speech on the floor of the House. She was not new to public speaking and had had occasions of addressing public meetings, but she had never before spoken in the Assembly. The first Government resolution, rejecting the Government of India Act and demanding a new Act to be framed by a Constituent Assembly, representing the will of the Indian people, was to be moved by the Premier, who, however, was suddenly confined to bed and the choice fell on Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. She courageously stood up, mustered up mental equipoise and began to speak. The speech went smoothly and her stage fright vanished. Every one has to pass through the initial stages of apprenticeship and she too did. With such a marvellous speed, however, she picked up the technique of the 'Secretariat boss' and the Legislator, that even the veterans of the time wondered at her ability.

The resolution ran thus : " This Assembly is of opinion that the Government of India Act, 1935, in no way represents the will of the Nation and is wholly unsatisfactory, as it has been designed to perpetuate the

subjection of the people of India. The Assembly demands that this should be repealed and replaced by a Constitution for a free India framed by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise, which allow the Indian people full scope for development according to their needs and desires."

Whereupon Mr. Muhammad Ismail Khan stood up to move an amendment, that the Constituent Assembly be convened " provided that in the absence of an agreed settlement the measure and the method of the representation of the Muslims to the Constituent Assembly shall be the same as that provided in the Communal Award and provided further that the Constituent Assembly shall not be competent to alter or vary the personal law on the existing civil, political, and religious rights of the Muslims without the consent of three-fourth of the Muslim representation."

And Nawab Dr. Sir Muhammad Ahmad Said Khan hastened to safeguard the interests of landlords and capitalists, adding, "Provided that landlords, depressed classes and other

minority communities shall receive adequate and special representation and that the Constituent Assembly shall not interfere with lawful and legitimate rights and interests in private property."

Her oratory burst forth bright and convincing and expression knew no bounds while she was sometimes required to speak on her favourite topic,—the social condition of women in India—, and what surprised one the most was the presence of mind, and the brilliancy of wit she maintained in her speeches even while speaking before and replying the questions of the distinguished learned legislators of the Province.

In March 1938 she was one day, on the floor of the House, making some reference to Indian womanhood of the day, whereupon Mr. H. G. Walford intervened and cried forth a question :

"Are not the women of this country depressed and suppressed ?"

Presently she admitted : "Mr. Walford has rightly said that women are depressed and suppressed." "I say that they are

oppressed also," she added in a loud emotional tone, which lent emphasis and charm to her expression. Mr. H. G. Walford had, however, unnecessarily interrupted and made an uncalled for remark which attacked Indian womanhood. She therefore would not let the questioner and other members of his sex go unremonstrated. With still more vigour therefore she remarked, "and since I have this opportunity I would like to request some of the Honourable members who have made such chivalrous and beautifully high-sounding speeches about women to try and come forward and translate all this beauty of their words into the beauty of action." There was pin-drop silence in the House and members, all-attention, listened to the subtle remonstrance of a courageous woman.

Explaining to the House the policy of the Congress Ministry in respect of public health she once, addressing the members in Hindustani, said :

"The Government desire that in every village and every district there should be

adequate arrangement to safeguard public health. Every one should get satisfactory medical aid . . . the present rate of infant mortality should be checked. We wish to do all this and we will do all this."

Referring to untouchability she once remarked : "*It is sometimes asked, ' what has the Congress Ministry done for the Achuts (untouchables) ' . The Honourable members perhaps do not know that in the Congress there is no Achut. The very word, which is so repugnant to humanity, is not to be found in the Congress dictionary.*"

In October 1939 a resolution was presented to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly, by the then Premier, Pt. G.B. Pant, protesting against the Government's action in making India a participant in the war without her consent, and demanding that she should be regarded as an independent Nation entitled to frame her own constitution. Supporting the resolution in unequivocal terms Mrs. Pandit in the distinguished congregation of the Legislative Assembly thus declared : " Sir, I rise to support the resolution before the

House . . . Our country has been made a participant in a war which is being fought many thousands of miles away from here. *Our opinion and advice have not been sought, because being an enslaved nation of what value is our opinion or our advice.* We are informed that this war that is being fought is a war of righteousness, that this is being fought for those principles which go to make life worth living whether for the individual or for the nation. But these brave words have ceased to have any meaning for us because throughout the centuries Britain has prefaced all declarations of war in a similar manner. *It is therefore our right to know where we stand. It is our right to demand from Britain what the better world order is which we are to create . . .*"

Exhorting different communities of India to unite for snatching power from Britain she observed: "Let us put our heads together and evolve a better method of democratic procedure . . . We have enough experience of empty promises in the past. Let us not fall into this trap again, *for years and years the British policy has been to magnify our differences seeing divergence of*

policies where merely differences of temperament exist. *Let us now give a challenge to Britain that the people of India stand united and if our co-operation is of any value to Britain, it can be conceded as a free nation and an equal partner.* If our just demand is rejected, the war degenerates into a war between two imperialistic powers, for world domination. The interest of our country demands our unity in face of a common and growing danger. Let us not hold back, because remember—If India dies who lives? If India lives, who dies? ”

Some of the Bills introduced by her in Legislative Assembly were: the United Provinces Municipalities (Amendment) Bill, 1939; the United Provinces District Boards Amendment Bill, 1939, which proposed to transfer the control of Education to District Boards directly with a view to initiating an educational device in the province; and the United Provinces Indian Medicine Bill, 1939.

While she still held the office of the Minister of Local Self-Government in the



U. P. cabinet she again went to Europe. Her stay in the Continent coincided with the most critical period of European History—a little before the World War II broke out. She was in London when the Munich Pact was signed.

On her way back to India, a period when Europe was heading towards World War she saw hundreds of young boys, dressed in the Fascist uniform passing in military order through a street of an Italian town—probably it was some youth day celebration. The sight of those young boys, she says, reminded her of the ugly force of Fascism ; of a totalitarian state which endeavoured to rule by the power of might alone, crushing justice and liberty. The young men seemed to her a flock of sheep being driven, all unconscious, to the slaughter-house of the war.

Soon after came the World War II, when she, with other members of the Congress Ministry, tendered her resignation.

On the 5th December, 1940 she was arrested as a Satyagrahi in the non-violent

campaign which Mahatma Gandhi started, and was sentenced to 4 months' simple imprisonment, which period she spent in Naini Central Jail, in full.

## Stormy Days of 1942

*"We may still be behind other nations, but the Dawn breaks and the first bright rays are stealing over the country giving hope to many weary hearts. . . . India would live and her future would grow into a glorious thing."*

*—Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.*

From the Minister's room furnished with a beige and bluish green carpet curtains to match and 'Khurja' bowls filled with roses, perched around the 'angled' ebony table, to the dark and dingy prison cells is a pretty drastic change, and yet such is the lot which political leaders in India have to face. That is what Vijaya Lakshmi did, and with remarkable adjustment.

With the on-coming of the war she with all other Congress Ministers, had tendered her resignation from ministership in compliance with the instructions from the Congress High Command. The political atmosphere in the

country was tense. Gandhiji started his, what is known, a symbolic or individual Satyagraha,—as a sort of ‘socio-metaphysical’ move from the Mahatma, the significance of which the fiery vigorous youth of the age has yet to understand !

Pandit Jawahar Lal’s historic ‘ultimatum’ to the British Government asking them to explain the principles and the objectives for which they were fighting, to enable the Congress to decide whether or not to support the Allies in the war ; Cripps Mission and its failure etc., etc., were the other most significant events in the Indian politics of the intervening period.

As has already been pointed out, the atmosphere in the country was explosive and both the Government and the Congress were heading towards a terrible clash with each other. With the failure of the Cripps Mission things came to a climax and there came the disturbances of the year 1942.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit with other soldiers of freedom, took to her post of duty

and played her due role in the battle for freedom of mother India, which the Britishers call 'Rebellion' and for that matter they may label it as 'Mutiny'—well, what is in a name !

Day and night she ran about in the whirlwind of the stormy politics of the times, dazed and tired—, now here now there.

The whole country from one end to the other was agog with political upheavals. A slave people tired of endless waiting had decided to cast off the yoke of a foreign bureaucracy by hook or by crook. They came up to open rebellion. "Non-violence or violence, come what may, we must be free," they shouted : "quit India—quit India," they cried hoarse ; "do or die," they exhorted each other. People mad with fury of revenge against the repressive measures of the Government cut off telephone wires, derailed the trains, and set the offices etc. on fire. On the other hand, the bureaucracy was bent upon crushing the spirit of fiery patriotism. Daily reports of lathi charges, firing and indiscriminate machine-gunning came, now from this place

now from that.

She toured from place to place and tried to check the mad, excited masses who were bent upon having revenge against the tyrannies of the Government. Her appeals were not of much avail. Masses were pent up and would not be pacified.

In the face of indiscriminate firing she rushed in crowds, helped to pick up the wounded and arranged their removal to the hospitals.

And then the inevitable happened.

At 2 a.m. on the 12th of August, 1942 she was awakened and told that the police authorities had come up to arrest her and were waiting with her warrants. Referring to the occasion in her diary she writes . . . . . "the police had arrived . . . It was 2 a.m. My mind was a confused jumble of events of the preceding twenty-four hours. The shots fired on the students procession were still ringing in my ears and before my eyes I could only see the faces of those young men whom I had helped to pick up and remove to hospital. I was utterly weary in mind and

body and more than a little dazed."

Her daughters were asleep at the hour and she did not like to disturb them. She went up to the porch, switched on the light and found that some police officers with quite so many constables had come up to the verandah. This annoyed her. "Why is it necessary for so many armed men to come to arrest one unarmed woman"? she asked, ordering them to get off the verandah.

The girls were awakened and she broke the news to them. 'They were brave as always and immediately grasped the situation—no useless questions, no fuss. All three of them helped her to pack things. Rita looked at her mother with big eyes heavy with sleep. Looking at the child mother's courage began to ebb. She was so little and the world was so big—who would take care of her? "I wish I could go to jail too," said Rita, and then she clung to her mother and said, "Mummie darling, take care of yourself. We shall be fighting the British outside while you are in".

“ Darling, don’t worry, everything will be fine ”, said Lekha embracing her mother affectionately.

Several police lorries were lined up on the road-side. She was shown in to one of the lorries and driven off to Naini Jail.

The lorry arrived at the jail. After half an hour’s waiting the door of the female prison was opened. She was conducted to the ‘old familiar barrack’ (for she had been to that jail before too) wherein she spread her bedding on the ground, was locked in, and a new term of jail life began.

After about 9 months’ imprisonment she was released on the 11th June, 1943 on grounds of ill-health.

Jail confinement had affected her health very badly. The misery and rigour of 9 months’ jail life made her look ten years older and when after the expiry of the term of imprisonment His Majesty’s Government were ‘pleased to release’ her, she looked worn-out and rugged. Mrs. Krishna Hutheesingh (Jawahar Lal’s other sister) who saw her



after the release, depicts her impression of Vijaya Lakshmi's appearance in the following words : " With sinking heart I got out of the tonga and went in search of Swarup. As I entered her room she got up to greet me and embrace me. I put my arms around her trying not to let her see how moved I was at her changed appearance. A year ago I had seen her looking ten years younger than she really was. Nine months she had been in jail and was out for a few short weeks now. Once more jail had wrought havoc on a loved one and left its mark all too plainly on the face which had aged considerably in those few months."

In spite of her weak health, however, immediately after release from Naini Jail, she took up the Famine Relief work, became president of the " Save the Children " Fund Committee started by the All-India Women's Conference, and devoted herself wholeheartedly to other allied public welfare activities.

## Whirlwind Tour in America

*I speak here for my country because its national voice has been stilled by British duress. I also speak for those countries which are under the heels of militarists and cannot speak for themselves. I speak in particular for Burma, Malaya, Indo-China and Dutch East Indies, all bound to my own country by the closest ties of historical and cultural kinship, and which cherish aspirations to national freedom like our own. Liberation from Japan should mean for them, I submit, liberation from all alien Imperialism so far as this Conference is concerned.*

*(Mrs. Pandit, in her Memorandum to the San Francisco Conference).*

In November 1944 she sailed for the United States of America, partly to see her daughters studying there and partly with a view to acquaint the American people with the true state of affairs in India as against, and in contrast to, what they came to know through the vilifying anti-Indian propaganda

carried on in the U. S. A. by the agents of the British Government.

Before she arrived at the scene, Americans had been brought round to believe that India was a land of snake-charmers, astrologers, and charlatans, where the so-called 'natives' lived on trees! A gang of loyal puppets of the British Imperialism—Messrs. Bajpai and Co.—had propagated amongst the American people that India was a house divided against itself', wherein the British were trying to bring the fundamentally irreconcilable elements together without success, and that if the British were not there to police those warring elements the country would be given away to anarchy and chaos, which would ultimately affect the world peace. It was given out that Mahatma Gandhi and his followers in the Congress were agents of Japan, and that the Congress was a fascist body mainly dominated by the Hindu capitalists of the land, who wanted the British to quit India, so that in their absence they (the Hindu capitalists) might establish a Hindu bureaucracy with a view

to exploit the masses in general and the minority communities in particular.

Almost all the Congress leaders and with them thousands of other political prisoners were rotting in the prison cells of India. There was no way out. The bureaucracy simply refused to come to any terms with Indian leaders : they even refused to attempt at negotiations. Political deadlock had evolved into a stagnant stalemate. People were terror-stricken and helpless but rebellious at heart.

During that period it was declared that the Allied Nations of the world, who fought the World War II, for the principles of democracy, justice and freedom and to liberate Europe (and no Asiatic territory !) from the shackles of Nazism and Fascism, would meet at San Francisco, U. S. A., with a view to draw out a charter for establishing permanent peace in the world. His Excellency the Viceroy, with a 'farman' nominated three knights—Sir Firoz Khan Noon, Sir Ramaswami and Sir M. Krishnamachari, (all three of them known as first

class 'yesmen' of the British Government)—as India's representatives in the San Francisco Conference, without even consulting any element of public opinion in India. The above-named Sirs, nominated in the most undemocratic way, were to be sent to an Assembly which met for the purpose of formulating a democratic charter! How funny!

And how eager were these 'yesmen' to exhibit their loyalty to Britannia at the earliest possible hour, is evident from the fact that even before leaving for U. S. A., while in London, Sir Firoz declared in a public meeting in unequivocal terms that *India in fact was already a free country, and had already attained Dominion Status*, a fact which he said even His Majesty's Government did not know! He maintained that members of the Viceroy's Executive Council were free to pursue any line of policy they thought beneficial to the country, and that the Viceroy did not interfere in the day-to-day working of the Executive Council at all! These 'revelations' of Sir Firoz Khan Noon evoked nothing but ridicule and laughter

from the educated classes in India. Sir M. Krishnamachari and Sir Firoz in an interview to Mr. J. J. Singh (another patriotic Indian in U. S. A. who during the days of the San Francisco Conference did his best to enlighten the Americans on the issue) told that their objective would be to secure a permanent seat for India on the Security Council. All that they had in view was the securing of a 'permanent seat' and none talked of raising the issue of India's freedom!

Sir Ramaswami interviewed by J. J. Singh said: "We are responsible to the Government of India, not His Majesty's Government." What did it matter whether he represented His Majesty's Government or the Government of India—for there is a difference as between tweedledum and tweedledee only. He, however, did not represent the Indian people.

With such puppets representing India at San Francisco people were naturally disappointed and did not expect much from the Conference, so far as India's interest was concerned. *The only ray of hope was the*

*presence of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in America.*

In the meantime came the news that she had decided to represent India's case to the Allied Nations Security Council in the form of a memorandum. All eyes were therefore turned towards her and people looked up to her with eager expectations.

Near about the end of April, 1945, she arrived at San Francisco, whereupon a leading English nationalist daily of Northern India observed in its editorial: "Now Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit is at San Francisco. Her presence there must be giving the Indian delegation sleepless nights."

When she arrived at San Francisco a group of her countrymen including Dr. Anup Singh and Mr. J. N. Sharma and also many other Indians including women some of whom had travelled as long as 900 miles, welcomed her and loaded her with garlands.

The first fire she shot at San Francisco was the declaration: "*I desire to make it clear that the so-called Indian representatives attending the San Francisco Conference have not the slightest representative capacity, no*

*sanction, no mandate from any of the responsible groups in India and are merely nominees of the British Government. Anything they say here or any vote they cast can have no binding effect or force on the people of India.*

Referring to the Indian delegates Mr. Iftone, "P.M's" correspondent wrote : ' They have been chosen by the Government without consultation of Indian parties or political leaders, most of whom are still in jail including the far-seeing Nehru, who would have shone even in a gathering of giants.'

Sir Firoz, and others of his class, the so-called ' Indian representatives' to the San Francisco Conference, were afraid of their own non-representative shadow; their own conscience pricked them but instead of facing Mrs. Pandit's challenge, they were reported to have come down to practices which were rather unbecoming of at least the titles which they carried about themselves. On one occasion when Mrs. Pandit was giving a press conference, a fellow known as Khurshid Ahmed Khan, a stenographer attached to the Indian delegation and to Sir Firoz, tried to



heckle her with meaningless questions, right and left. It was believed that the fellow had been planted there by Sir Firoz with a view to heckle Mrs. Pandit, as a retaliatory measure against her challenging Sir Firoz's non-representative character in the Conference. But the efforts of the 'Stooge' instead of disreputing Mrs. Pandit, boomeranged, and Mrs. Pandit received much wider publicity than she would have otherwise received. One of the papers published the heckler's photograph with specification, "Ejected from Conference."

In the first week of May, 1945, Mrs. Pandit on behalf of the India League of America, and National Committee for India's Freedom submitted to the San Francisco Conference a memorandum calling for an immediate declaration of India's independence.

The memorandum described the Indian problem as the acid test of the principles on which the hopes of the Conference were postulated. It stated that India's dependent status was not only a grave moral and political wrong to India, but a travesty of the

claim that the United Nations Conference consisted of representatives of sovereign nations. Mrs. Pandit declared that she spoke not only for India but also for Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, and Dutch East Indies, for whom she claimed liberation from all alien Imperialism.

In the memorandum which was submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, Mrs. Pandit described herself in a formal preamble as Madame Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, spokesman for India. ✓

The text of the memorandum added :

“ As a member of the Indian National Congress Party in India, and one who has been selected to be the spokesman for India on the occasion of the United Nations Conference for international organization in San Francisco by the India League of America (which is an organization predominantly of American citizens devoted to the cause of Indian freedom) and by the National Committee for India's freedom (which represents a vast majority of Indian nation resident in the United States) I desire respectfully to admit

the following observation and representation with a request that you place them before the members of the delegations of the United Nations now assembled in the Conference.

As M. Molotov mentioned at his press conference on April 30, "we have at this Conference an Indian delegation. But India is not an independent state. We all know a time will come when the voice of independent India will be heard too. Nevertheless we share the view held by the British Government that the representatives of India should be granted a seat at the Conference, imperfect though her status is."

The memorandum continued, "The fact that the head of the delegation of one of the four sponsoring nations at this Conference has pointed out firstly that India is not an independent state, secondly there is a delegation present at this Conference from India which was invited at the request of the British Government and thirdly he understands that sometime in the future, the voice of India will be heard, provides (me) an opportune moment for the discharge of

necessary duty, namely to draw the attention of the United Nations Conference to **the problem of India**, which is at once the acid test of the principles on which the hopes of the Conference are postulated and a cancerous menace to the prospects of lasting concord and harmony among nations after the labours of this Conference, as we all hope, are fruitfully concluded.

### **A Few Essential Facts**

“ Let me recapitulate a few essential and inescapable facts. India today comprises 400 million people naturally and necessarily consisting of various racial and cultural groups, and with a geographical area almost the size of the Continent of Europe. Nevertheless India is a geographical unit, cultural unit and economic unit. India furthermore represents one of the oldest living civilizations of the world and has been the centre of culture for centuries.

“ Yet India is today a dependency of Great Britain which is represented at this Conference by the grace and by the agency

of her Imperial Government. She is without a national government or a national flag and without any national representation or diplomatic exchange in the councils of nations except by employees and appointees of her British masters.

“ Such a state of affairs, I submit, is not only a grave, moral and political wrong to India, but a travesty of the claim that the United Nations Conference consists of representatives of sovereign nations. Continuance of such a situation affecting the honour, liberty, peace and progress of one-fifth of mankind is irreconcilable alike with the concepts that have inspired the United Nations Conference, and with the new world which, it is hoped, will be ushered in as a result of its concrete decisions.

“ Imperialism should go.

“ Commissar Molotov has said, ‘ We all know that a time will come when the voice of independent India will be heard.’ Why should such voice not be heard now ? The Indian National Congress Party, representing

the Indian people, has always stood uncompromisingly against Fascism, Nazism and Imperialism. Organised Fascism and Nazism have now been liquidated. Imperialism alone remains and is entrenched in a system which implies coercion, domination and exploitation of one country by another. I submit that this system should be denounced in principle and abandoned in practice by an unequivocal acknowledgment and declaration of a free India.

*"I speak here for my country because its national voice has been stifled by British duress. I also speak for those countries which are under the heels of alien Militarists and cannot speak for themselves. I speak in particular for Burma, Malaya, Indo-China and Dutch East Indies, all bound to my own country by the closest ties of historical and cultural kinship and which cherish aspirations to national freedom like our own. Liberation from Japan should mean for them, I submit, liberation from all alien imperialism so far as this Conference is concerned.*

"The voice of some 600 million enslaved

people of Asia may not be officially heard at this Conference and those who have usurped their birthright and freedom may cynically claim to speak for them but there will be no real peace on this earth so long as they are denied justice. Recognition of India's independence now will be a proclamation and assurance to the whole world that the statesmen of the United Nations, assembled at the Solemn Conclave at San Francisco, have in truth and honour heralded the dawn of a new and better day for an all but crucified humanity."

During that period, Count Richard Couden hove-Kalergi of the New York University also presented a memorandum on the San Francisco Conference to Mr. Stettinius, demanding among other things that India be granted a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

The memorandum howsoever just and humane, the cause which it represented was not entertained by the Council of Allied diplomats, as they said the question of India's freedom was not included in the

agenda of the Council which, it was told, had met at San Francisco solely with a view to discuss ways and means and draw out a charter for maintenance of peace in the world. (How could they bring about peace in the world unless 400 million souls of India were freed from the shackles of slavery? and for that matter how could any one say that the question of India's freedom didn't fall within the scope of their discussions?)

During those days Mr. J. J. Singh, another patriotic Indian in America, also tried to raise the question of India's present status and future freedom at many press conferences. He put the question to Messrs. Stettinius, Stassen and Vendenberg of the American delegation, Mr. Evatt of Australia, Mr. Soong of China, Mr. Romulo of Philippines, Mr. Attlee and Lord Cranborne of the British delegation but most of the answers were evasive. Mr. Stassen, the spokesman of the American delegation, however, was straightforward and made it clear that at that conference there were specific territories which were not to be discussed in connection with



trusteeship. Neither was the independence of India to be a conference matter. In the light of what Mr. Stassen said the memorandum submitted by Mrs. Pandit remained just a piece of information brought by a representative of a slave country to the notice of an Assembly of Diplomats, who refused to discuss that. It was just the whizzing of a small mosquito near about the stable of a group of thick-skinned insensitive elephants who would not take notice of it! Some of the delegates are, however, reported to have expressed the view that India could present her case to the New League of Nations when and if one came into existence! This is how powerful nations hush up weaker one! Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, however, deserves her countrymen's gratitude for having presented her case to the San Francisco Conference and exposed credentials of the so-called defenders of freedom and democracy.

Presentation of a memorandum to the World Security Conference at San Francisco, advocating India's right to self-government and freedom from foreign yoke, formed however only a part of her programme in America.

In addition, she carried on a 'one woman' campaign throughout the length and breadth of the great continent acquainting the Americans (so far left in the dark) with the state of affairs in India and enlisting their sympathy for the cause of India's freedom. It was during those days that one of the leading English dailies of Northern India observed :

“Reports of her public addresses have been sent to the Indian press and her private off-the-record discussions have been considered by Indian leaders to be of great value in explaining the Indian situation to prominent Americans.”

At public gatherings she again and again urged the necessity of the release of Indian political leaders, who were then in jail.

On being questioned as to what kind of India would emerge, should the British relinquish power, she said, “India wants a popular, democratic government which will ensure to all Indians the enjoyment of the four freedoms enunciated by President Roosevelt. Under such a government India

would whole-heartedly co-operate with other freedom-loving nations to build a better and safer world."

Asked frequently whether the release of these men (Congress leaders) would bring about disorder in India, Mrs. Pandit emphatically retorted, 'No, that is just an excuse and not a very good one.'

As she made it clear at one place her campaign was not so much with a view to secure American help for India's deliverance, for she believed that none could help India win her freedom except her own people. She simply wanted to show the Americans the other side of the picture—the one which had been screened off by vile British propaganda. And with these objectives in view she put in 7 days' solid work in a week.

As early as 8 o'clock in the morning the telephone bell from some prospective visitor woke her up. In hurry she gulped in her morning coffee and orange juice, did her toilet, and thumbing through the morning papers for a few moments, would be up for her interviews.

During the days of the Conference there were about 2,000 press correspondents in San Francisco to cover the news. Hundreds of them requested her for a little talk and she met almost all of them.

During her stay over there she received a pretty heavy *dak* from friends and admirers; she even received letters and gifts from persons who didn't know her personally, but had simply read about her activities in the press.

After lunch she would have a little walk and would sometimes go in for shopping and thereafter again reverted back to interviews. She met President Truman and Lady Truman, entertained Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and a host of other prominent men of different countries of the world, all with a view to present India's case to as many people as possible.

Her evenings were taken up by dinner engagements, radio or personal appearances, and other public functions. Most of the arrangements in connection with her radio talks, public lectures, etc., were made by Dr.

Anup Singh, the Washington Representative of the National Committee for India's Freedom and Editor of the *Voice of India*. He went to California weeks ago to make the necessary preparations. It is difficult to give all the details of her American tour in a small booklet like this. Below is reproduced a report of her visit to Baltimore published in the *Tribune* dated the 10th April, 1945. This will enable the readers to form an idea as to how America in general might have reacted to her speeches.

“Baltimore, April 9.—The visit of Mrs. Pandit, who lectured in the City's largest auditorium, resulted in new social relationships between the Whites and the Negroes as well as lively political talk about India.

“Mrs. Pandit's visit received the highest official recognition when the City's Mayor welcomed her at the railway station and presented ‘Keys of the City’ which are traditionally reserved for the most notable guests.”

In her lecture arranged at the Lyric theatre, thirty per cent of the audience con-

sisted of Negroes besides Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Americans. Mrs. Pandit said that India stood for equality of all peoples and races and was entirely sympathetic with the U.S. Negroes. This aroused a great ovation and next day a leading Afro-American Newspaper headlined the lecture as :

“ India stands for equality says leader ”  
... Mrs. Juantia Mitchell, President of the Baltimore Section of the National Association for the advancement of coloured people said that the coloured people in America were cent-per-cent behind the Indian Freedom Movement.”

It was probably just a perchance coincidence that for some time during her stay in America she put up in a hotel where Sir Feroze and some other delegates to the San Francisco Conference were staying. Sir Feroze Khan Noon is also reported to have invited her to tea. She, however, declined to accept the invitation, telling Sir Feroze that as they had come to America on diametrically opposed ‘missions’ (he as an agent of British Imperialism and she as an advocate of a

repressed subject people) there was no common ground for them to meet each other.

## **Address to the Californian Legislature**

On May 14, 1945, the Legislature of California in U.S.A. adjourned a debate on the State's budget to hear Mrs. Pandit. The House was full to the utmost capacity and the members sat at the back of the rows of desks to hear her eloquent speech. There, in a grim, zestful atmosphere of an American republic, beneath the golden dome of the magnificent capital building of Sacramento, the capital of California, Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit declared that new ties forged between America and India would help the solution not only of India's problem, but the problem of colonial possessions everywhere.

In an earnest speech calling for sympathy for India's campaign for independence, delivered at the invitation of the State Legislature, Mrs. Pandit told the Assembly men: "So long as these Colonial vested interests remain, there can be no peace, there



can be no security. And so long as there is no security or peace, we shall go on destroying all that generations and centuries of human effort have built up. I believe these new ties will work for common good between peoples of the world—because it is the people who are going to build up the world structure.”

Declaring that the world must not think in terms of national freedom, but of the freedom for the whole world, Mrs. Pandit said: “We must inevitably consider America and India and all nations of the world as one unity. Therefore, I am happy to be able to tell you that in India we have come closer to America in understanding through those men who today are fighting in India. We have given them welcome and we believe they have brought back to America memories of friendship and understanding.

“No question can be solved by itself. Unless we are prepared to accept certain principles, we shall not be successful, however hard we try to find a solution to the problem of permanent peace and the security of the world.

“ In this reconstruction it is necessary to have the help and friendship of all nations. It is necessary to build up a new world with ties of cultural contacts, industrial and commercial contacts and contacts of every sort.

“ Before we can talk about interdependence, we must realise that it is only through independence that we can achieve interdependence. Because, I feel that so strongly, that I must remind you that if India were today an independent country, she would throw in her weight to a much larger measure and would help in building up the structure of security and permanent peace which is the aim of the nations at San Francisco.

“ India has it in her heart to work with other nations to help in an organization of the world in which all people can live in honour and justice. To a degree to which justice is denied to any group of people, to that degree will all these conferences have failed and the structure that has been envisaged for permanent peace be a failure also.

*“ So long as we think in terms of power*

*politics and political expediency, we cannot hope to achieve anything of lasting value.* But if the foundations of the new world structure are laid on justice and on the recognition of independence of all people, I believe it will be possible to avoid future conflicts and to have a world in which all people can work together for common good.

“It is not only a question of recognition of the principle of ultimate independence. The resolution has to be translated into action. I would like you in America to understand how vital it is for the future of the world that these problems are approached in terms of realism and understanding, and that this independence, which you have fought to preserve, is something which those, who have not yet achieved it, value even more dearly than you who now possess it.”

Declaring that the people of India tremendously admired the people of England, Mrs. Pandit said that it was the system they fought, not the people. Only with the liquidation of the system of Colonial domination

could there be any harmony in the world.

Mrs. Pandit concluded her reaffirmation of her belief in the future to which the world could be built up. "I believe the future will be built up into a really beautiful thing through the efforts of all those who desire justice, honour and peace among nations.

"I think America is going to play a vital part in this new world structure. But you cannot hold on to your greatness, unless you realise, that it is by sharing and not by possessing, that the world rises. The extent to which you insist on this principle will be the extent to which you have achieved greatness now and in the world to come."

Mr. Ernest Debs, the Assembly man who took a leading part in inviting Mrs. Pandit and who presided over the house, thanked her for the speech with the declaration that *"a hundred and fifty years ago we in the United States were striving for the same thing which you are striving for. I feel strongly on the subject of freedom not only for India but for all peoples all over the world."*

While in California Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit spent a day among some 5,000 Sikhs explaining to them the meaning of the United Nations Conference.

Addressing thousands of Indians who had come from all parts of California, where they are now settled, Mrs. Pandit spoke from the dais in the famous Stockton Sikh temple, which is the only building of its kind in the United States, she said: "My memory here goes back to the days enveloped in the dark cloud of oppression, when so many in India had to undergo so much suffering and sorrow. The situation is somewhat better now, but still we are not free. We are going on with the fight, not only for the cause of India, but for the cause of freedom of oppressed people everywhere."

Addressing herself directly to hundreds of Americans among the audience, she declared: "Our fight is much bigger than the fight for freedom of just one people. It is a fight for a world-wide freedom. You Americans have been watching San Francisco and hoping that from this Conference will come a

just and lasting peace. But it cannot be a success to settle the destiny of the world without first consulting the wishes of the people of the world. For us—who are outside the Conference—it is very important to draw the attention of the delegates to the principles of right and justice on which a lasting peace must be built. Our leaders forget when deciding on important issues that personal freedom is one of the most important concepts upon which world peace is founded.

“Today, we cannot afford to make any more mistakes in planning the future of mankind. We made some grave mistakes after the last war and endured unheard-of miseries and sufferings. Today, the world cannot endure any more suffering. This time we have to decide to make good the mistakes made after the last war.

“Only through the freedom of India can we contribute to the freedom of the rest of the world.

“We are rejoicing today in the defeat of Fascism, but we forget the cause of Fascism—Imperialism.

“Unless that is defeated too there can be no peace in the world, no matter how many San Francisco Conferences we hold. We must raise our voice to say that peace must be based on the fundamental principles of democracy, unless the Allies of today split up to become the enemies of tomorrow.”

Mrs. Pandit who motored with newsmen and members of her party from San Francisco to Stockton was received by the whole Sikh community and the Mayor of the town.

## Restless India

*This contribution was written by Mrs. Pandit at the request of the Foreign Policy Association of New York to be incorporated, together with a contribution from Lord Halifax, presenting the British point of view, in Lawrence Rosinger's forth-coming book " Restless India " which the Association will publish.*

*After Mrs. Pandit had written the piece, the Association found it inexpedient to include it in the book.*

I have read the piece by Mr. Lawrence Rosinger with interest and appreciation. His facts are accurate, his presentation fair and, what is more rare, he reveals an insight into the psychology of the Indian problem in contradistinction to its mere politics.

India is restless, and has been acutely so for the last quarter of a century, and will be increasingly so with every day that passes



until she is free from British control. This basic, inevitable and unescapable fact should be clearly understood by all those who are interested in India, in Britain, and the future peace of the world.

There are, naturally, many factors that have combined to create and accentuate the present crisis. There are psychological and spiritual elements, as well as political and economic, involved in the matter. I may mention some of them.

First of all, for the last fifty years or more, or since the founding of the Indian National Congress, there has been a growing consciousness on the part of the people of India of the *essential immorality of British rule over that country*. This sentiment has been heightened, during the same period of time, by the experience of the Indian people of repeated British promises and pledges, couched in the most solemn terms, which nevertheless failed of materialization.

I think it is the simple truth to say, as a statement of fact, that the vast majority of Indian men and women, educated or other-

wise, do not today have the slightest faith in the integrity or honour of British statesmen, be they Tory, Liberal, or Labourite. One may go farther and say that the vast majority of Indians of all kinds and communities are convinced that British policy in India rests and functions on a system of calculated hypocrisy—a sort of long-range stalling, plausible procrastination and self-righteous declarations of honesty of purpose. This technique of delay and denial is worked out by incessant and unending recapitulations of the differences, dissensions and social handicaps of the country, all magnified and distorted out of focus, to constitute an alibi of India's unpreparedness, or unfitness, as the case may be, for independence. To this end the natural divisions of racial or religious groups which must necessarily exist in a vast country such as India have been artificially erected into impassable and unbridgable barriers, and the groups themselves made to look like perpetually warring factions insusceptible alike of national unity or political cohesion.

By a system of separate electorates so called, which means franchise on a basis of

religious beliefs, invented by the British government, it has been sought to crystallize the Indian people into mutually exclusive watertight compartments of sect and community. Natural minorities exist in every country, and the whole trend and principle of modern civilized procedure has been to foster the coalescing of minority groups into the national organism. In India, however, constant wedges are driven to keep the minorities in political segregation, and they are used as so many pawns to deny the claim of Indian nationhood and to hamper the natural processes of national solidarity which inevitably follow a growing national consciousness among all civilized peoples. By the same token every factionist, however insignificant or irresponsible, is boosted by British authorities into a position of fantastic importance and invested with a claim to leadership which is more fictitious than real.

All this, perhaps, is very effective imperial politics, but to the people of India the whole thing looks like a systematic and permanent Ulsterization of the country. In the light of such a policy, carried on for a genera-

tion, they cannot believe in the good faith of the British. The British demand for national unity and agreement on fundamentals, in the face of such facts, becomes a mockery and an insult.

So far as India is concerned the sequel to her contribution of blood and treasure in the winning of the first World War was the massacre of Amritsar. Since that black day in Indo-British relations there has been an ever-widening breach between the British and Indians which was temporarily narrowed during the short-lived interlude of the constitutional concessions which became effective in 1937 in the setting up of the Provincial Governments.

With the advent of the Second World War, India was dragooned into it without even a pretence of constitutional consultation with national leaders, or with Prime Ministers in charge of Provincial Governments which the British themselves had recognized. India has played ever no inconsiderable part in the defence and saving of the British Empire and helping achieve the Victory. Her sons have perished on practically every battle-front

of the war.

What may now be expected by India from the British Imperialist authorities? The new British Labour Government, its earlier claims to liberalism notwithstanding, has made it clear that there will, in fact, be no deviation from the traditional imperialism of Churchill and his predecessors. Only the wilfully blind can fail to mistake or misunderstand the Labour Government's policy in Indonesia and Indo-China. Their attitude and activities in Burma, Malaya, and Siam are further confirmation of the same trend. India cannot take much stock in the new professions of British liberalism towards her, when all around her there is stark evidence that a ruthless Imperialism is trying to secure for itself a new lease of life.

Indians have come to feel that the British do not ever intend to let her have independence. The more sceptical, or realistic, among them consider that the British cannot afford to let go of India for the simple reason that India is the Empire. It is the profits and prestige of India that have made, and make,

the British Empire. Take India away and there will be no Empire either in a constitutional sense or in territorial reality. After the depletions and devastations they have suffered in the global war, the British can afford, less than ever, to forgo the cash and the credit that accrue to them from India. Therefore India has nothing to expect from the British on a voluntary basis. This is the line of thought as I have indicated, of some Indians, and I think the younger generation is more and more tending to share the same point of view. *They are beginning to lose faith in the efficacy alike of Mahatma Gandhi's gospel of non-violence and British claims of constitutional liberalism.* If the Labour Government turns out, in its imperialistic tactics and policy, to be no better than its Tory predecessors, I foresee nothing for India but blood and tears for those concerned.

The failure to usher in a new World Order and a just Peace after the first World War was a major factor in making possible, and indeed inevitable, the second World War. Today the world is charged with other varieties of explosive material not less deadly

bearing upon human peace and progress than the atom bomb. Americans who have played such a far-ranging and decisive role in the winning of victory, owe it to themselves not to neglect the implications of this human situation. As we see the picture, peace and imperialism are mutually incompatible. Even a United Nations Organization, if it became effective, could not impose peace on a world tormented with injustice and exploitation, and poisoned with hatred and bitterness.

Imperialism, as its whole history shows, breeds hatred and strife. India under-pins the whole structure of modern imperialism which the British are apparently so anxious to conserve and perpetuate. They have already sown the seeds of bitterness and desperation among the four hundred millions of the people of India. Among several other Asiatic peoples too they have provoked by their policies sentiments of hatred and impotent rage.

All this is tending to alienate the East from the West, and make genuine international co-operation in the future more difficult.

Restless India is the symbol and key of restless Asia. Without freedom India can have neither tranquillity nor progress, and with a restless India seething at its heart, there can be no real peace in Asia.

*The British statesmen had better make up their minds as to their choice between imperialism and world peace. And I would respectfully suggest that American statesmanship might assert and exert itself, before it is too late, to effectuate such international policies as would truly bring peace to mankind and obviate a third World War. [ The Voice of India ]*



## PART II



## Conflict of Duties

*" . . . . to each person comes a time when there is a conflict of duties and loyalties, and if the path I have chosen is not the right one, my children will forgive me, because they love me and are my friends."*

In one of her narratives she recalls an incident. She was persuading a 'very snug and respectable' lady to take interest in matters concerning the welfare of the country and the nation at large, whereupon the respectable lady completely lost her temper and retorted in anger, " Why should I leave my home and go out to do political work ? Is it not my duty to serve my husband and give him sons ? "

" Why should I bother about freedom for the country ? " she asked. On Vijaya Lakshmi's replying that in that way she would not only be able to serve the people

but will also have chances of having more personal freedom, the lady was all the more furious and said, " I have as much freedom as a decent woman asks for. It is only women like you, who have left your home, who talk about freedom."

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit tried in vain to explain to her that she (Mrs. Pandit) had not left her home, and that she had the welfare of her children and husband as much at heart as she (the lady) had, but the argument fell flat on her.

*(When, however, a few years after this incident Mahatma Gandhi's call for Civil Disobedience Movement came, the whole country from one end to the other was swayed. Men, women and children joined the movement in their thousands exposing themselves to firings and lathi charges; then, even the lady who had disagreed with Vijaya Lakshmi's ideas of freedom years ago, joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and was sent to jail wherein she actually produced a son to her husband!)*

The above bracketted narration, however,

is just by the way. Of real significance to us, for the present point under examination, are the remarks of the lady about Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit which represent the view-point of a certain section of the society in India, constituting mostly the uncompromising old, the priests, and the fanatics, who would never come out of the old traditional ways of thought. Their forefathers believed that 'to be mothers were women created and to be fathers men', and they too think as their forefathers did. A woman's place, for them, is essentially in the kitchen, no matter even if she were able to perform the duties of a statesman or a minister. The author has heard even highly educated men sneering with disdain and muttering, "Oh, what of that if she became a minister! She neglected her duties as a wife and mother. Her place was not the minister's office but the kitchen and the home." With such intellectual dwarfs argument and reason do not avail much. Otherwise none but the mentally defunct would deny that as a political worker she has contributed tremendous good to the society whereas if she had stuck to the 'old

traditional rut '—which for the above-referred critics would have been the proper course of life for her—she would not have contributed an iota of that good.

During the turbulent days of the year 1945, she did yeoman's service to India by presenting her case to the San Francisco Conference in the form of a Memorandum. She advocated India's cause in America at a time when the need for it was the greatest. Who else could do it, what she did? Could India ever benefit so much if she had decided to stick to the traditional order of life? And before that, while she was a Minister in the United Provinces Legislative Assembly, she thundered with so much vigour and courage on the floor of the house that the spokesmen and the puppets of the Bureaucracy trembled in their shoes. How many, even from amongst men, could do that?

And how on earth could any one say that she has disregarded her duties as a wife and as a mother. In this connection her prison diary published under the name 'The Prison Days' presents her mind to us. She is perfectly human—an affectionate wife and a

kind mother, therein. Being separated from her husband and children in the four walls of the prison house she constantly ruminates at their sweet memories and even feels panicky about their welfare. Her husband's health worries her.

*"I have had no news of Ranjit since he left for Bombay three weeks ago and am beginning to worry about him. I wish I could communicate with him and tell him to be careful about his health."*

Hope of a prospective interview with Ranjit keeps her excited.

*"I have permission to interview Ranjit to-morrow, I am so excited."*

And a brief interview does not satisfy her.

*"Lekha and I interviewed Ranjit . . . how unsatisfying a prison interview is."*

While both the husband and wife are detained in separate wards of the same jail, the idea of Ranjit being somewhere on the other side, awakens in her irresistible longings to see him.

*"He is somewhere on the other side of the wall and yet how far away. I have such a longing to see and speak to him."*

And then one fine morning Ranjit actually comes for interview.

*"I had been eagerly looking forward to seeing Ranjit on the 14th . . . I was on the point of breaking down when in walked Ranjit happy and full of spirits. 'Hallo old girl! What's wrong—bad news from home?' were his words. He came and put his arm around me and I collapsed!"*

Every hour amidst the stillness of the prison walls she is worried about the welfare of little Rekha, Rita, Tara and others so dear to her. She doesn't even forget the little Cairn Terrier Tangle, the news of whose illness makes her run about hither and thither to arrange for the medical aid.

She pines for her husband, and children and brother and wishes she were at home with the family and yet there is a cause greater and sublimer—the cause of the emancipation of 400 million souls of India now in bondage—which compels her to leave off her home, and her comforts. Her marital and parental obligations are no doubt obstructed but what of that! Hasn't she a justification for putting them off when necessary? Human mind has evolved much above the old and worn out-conception that only the



husband and children should be the objects for a woman to live and labour for. Husband, children and relatives form one circle—the immediate one around us; surrounded by still bigger circles of the city, the country, and then the world at large. Modern thinker refuses to be circumscribed by the narrow limitations of the family. A woman has her duties as a wife and as a mother too but while there is a greater cause—the cause of the emancipation of one-fifth of the humanity, smaller obligations give way and make room for bigger and grimmer ones.

The entire world is a big family for an evolved personality.

## Charm and Vigour Combined

*" I am one of those fortunate individuals who have always been able to get a thrill out of life and I can honestly say the occasions when I have been bored have been exceedingly rare. "—Mrs. Pandit*

Sufferings of the Nehru family are known to every body in India. With a sudden turn of circumstances a house full of giggling laughters, ease and aristocracy was turned into one, constantly subjected to police raids and other most atrocious inflictions of the foreign government. The inmates suffered imprisonments, tortures, pangs of separation, disease and death but didn't budge an inch from the path which they confidently felt was right. But for an exceptionally strong will to live and conquer difficulties, the Nehrus would have probably prostrated before the mighty forces of the foreign Bureaucracy.

Like her brother, Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit also has inherited her share of the characteristic 'will to win' from her late father whose courage and determination few could excel. Necessity of endeavour to overcome difficulties, opposition and criticism, provides her with opportunities of getting, what she calls, thrill from life. In an autobiographical sketch she writes, "Difficulties, opposition, criticism, these things are meant to be overcome and there is a special joy in facing them and coming out on top. It is only when there is nothing but praise that life loses its charm and I begin to wonder, what I should do about it ! "

She doesn't very much appreciate the 'thou shalt do no harm' and 'suffering maketh a perfect man' principles which unfortunately have constituted a marked trait in Indian politics ever since the political movement began.

In moments of calm reflection one is disappointed to find that our political ideals are tainted with a queer, morbid desire for suffering—suffering for its own sake irrespective of its bearing on the results, if any. This

self-abnegation and asceticism, technically called 'massochism', has become, due to prolonged propagation and practice, a second nature with us, for which we have partly to blame the terroristic Government which has constantly been suppressing all political aspirations and persecuting the patriots, but partly we have also to blame our own philosophy of life, so deep-rooted in the soil, even before the English or the Mughals came in India. Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit has no doubt suffered for the cause of India's freedom in no way less than any other leader of her rank, but she has always pertinently avoided suffering when she thought there were no grounds for that, and refused to make a martyr of herself when either reason or her own health didn't allow such suffering. In April 1943 while she was in jail she declined to sleep inside the barracks in sympathy with other prisoners, who weren't allowed to sleep outside, on the ground that her delicate health didn't permit her to do so.

She refuses to suffer on purely sentimental issues.

An intimate observation of her day-to-

day living makes one feel that she not only lives life but chews every moment of it and relishes it. In struggling hard against the obstacles lies for her, as it does with other members of the Nehru family, the real pith and the significance of life.

In addition to the vigour of personality and other qualities, as described heretofore, her personal charm has come rather handy to her in contributing to her success in the public life. She swayed the American Continent from end to end with her speeches and the Yanks, the Negroes and other nationals of U.S.A. listened to her with rapt attention. What caught their interest was no doubt the humaneness of India's cause coupled with her impressive and beautiful oratory, but her personal charm attracted them no less. Under the heading ' Her Charm Delights Her Listeners ' an English daily of Northern India dated the 9th April, 1945, reported.

“ American interest in the problems of India has been lightened by the visit of Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, whose personal charm has delighted her listeners at a large number of public and private meetings.”

Mrs. Krishna Hutheesing, younger sister to Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, writes thus about Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

“ From her childhood, Swarup (family name of Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit) had been a very tactful person and was eminently suited to become a minister. She seldom, if ever, gets agitated over anything and deals with all kinds of situations in a calm unruffled manner. Charming, self-possessed and beautiful, she has little difficulty in winning people over. As a minister she was a great success. It was a difficult task she undertook to perform never having been trained for any work of that type, but she excelled herself at it and was very popular. When Swarup started taking an active part in politics her ability as a speaker surprised us all. She seemed to have been born to it and seldom showed any signs of nervousness, no matter how large the gathering, which she had to address. She speaks with fluency and ease both in Hindustani and English.”

When she was still quite young her hair had started to become grey—this is a hereditary trait running in the family. All too

rapidly her hair became white and yet more white. Now she has silvery white hair but this factor doesn't in any way take away her physical charm ; on the contrary, it adds to her loveliness.

She is a capable mother and an efficient housewife. In spite of the fact that politics take up a great deal of her time, she still finds time to look after her home and children.

## On Women

*"There can be no civilization in which man and woman are not equal partners. There can be no nation which has not been built up by their joint efforts. There can be no unity for which both man and woman have not worked and planned together, and there can be no freedom unless man and woman march forward together and achieve it."—Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in a radio talk*

Her conception of a woman is rather different. She never thinks of her as one

*"Who sits on a cushion and sews a fine seam,  
And feeds upon strawberries, sugar and cream."*

For, she thinks that 'the strawberries are beginning to pall, and too much cream and sugar are bad for the digestion'.

Regarding the relationship between man and woman in life, she not only preaches complete equality between them but even



her own life is a practical example of the above social philosophy.

She doesn't have that traditional reverence for the repressive social laws of the society which have kept women in bondage so far, and would not take those laws as 'absolute and final writs of Providence.' She calls a spade a spade when necessary, and does so publicly without fear of contradiction or wrath of the so-called 'defenders of the faith.'

— Tracing back the socio-biological background of the present subjection of women, she in the course of a talk observed, "We (women) in the East are even today hedged in by taboos of various description . . . the very system of female education was designed with the idea of persuading woman that she was in need of protection which could be given only if she would abide by certain rules. In no period of her existence has woman been free."

From a general review of the background of social supremacy of man over woman everywhere in the world, she passes on to specific Indian conditions and gives a passing thought to the social laws of Manu, the great law-

giver of the Hindu India of ancient days, whose verdicts are still acted upon in the form of provisions in the modern Hindu Law, and respected by the orthodox folks. There is no doubt ancient sages in Hinduism, as in many other religions of the world, have laid down great truths pregnant with invaluable wisdom based upon intensive experience of men and matters; but they have also laid down principles which in the present-day society cannot command respect from people with just and scientific outlook. Some of these principles had their social value at the time when they were formulated and now, due to the changed social environments, need relaxation, amendment or complete abolition. Apart from them, there are customs and rules which were unjust even at the time when they were made. They were accepted by the ancient people because the social philosophy of that time was less evolved and the 'aggressor,' and the 'possessor' in men governed their social outlook more than it does now; or if we take it like that, it may be said that the 'aggressor' and the 'possessor' in man is still there but it has drifted on to other

channels of social activity and is relaxing its hold from the sphere of relationship between the sexes.

From a reference to Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's social view-point we drifted on to a general discussion of a principle. Let us revert back to the original trend. The point under reference was Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's view-point regarding our socio-religious laws, especially those which govern the relationship between men and women. Referring to the laws of Manu, in the course of the radio talk, referred to herebefore, she said, "In our own country the famous law-giver, Manu, has expressed the same sentiment. According to him a woman in childhood must be protected by her father, in youth by her husband, in old age by her son, and I am tempted to add at all times by her priest, for perhaps nowhere more than in India is woman the unconscious victim of the priest." I said she calls a spade a spade ! How bold is she ! or else in an ultra-religious country like India where dogma holds its sway over the masses in all spheres of life ; where even a politician, in order to win the following of the

masses, has to become 'half priest half politician', it may be sacrilegious to trespass the domain of the priest. And yet it doesn't mean that she has no respect for the finer and spiritual principles of life, which alone for her constitute the spirit of religion. She, as all other rationalists of the age do, interprets religion only in terms of social relations (and a man with a reasoning and inquisitive mind would wonder if there can be any interpretation of the so-called 'religion', in terms other than of social relations !)

The story of the subjection of Indian women, however, doesn't end with the priest. To maintain his hold upon the ignorant folks, the priest must have a 'system' and for the uphold of the system there should be a class of the supporters of that system. The system is the dogmatic way of life as exhibit in the institutions of the Caste, the Family, etc. The upholders of the system constitute generally the old men and women who too like the priest have their own sphere of authority, *viz.*, over the young men and women in the family. "Brought up in . . . the four walls of her house the Indian girl was the property of her

father, who gave her away in marriage. She then became the property of her husband and her whole life was spent in humble and devoted service. If she would have the misfortune to become a widow, she bowed in submission to her sons. Religion, caste and society laid down certain rules, which had to be observed in order to secure protection for the woman and ensure happiness and prosperity for her husband's family. If she swerved from this path she became an outcaste. This duty was, in almost every instance, defined by man, but ruthlessly enforced by the older women, who having spent their own lives in dependence and subjection, were not going to allow their grand-daughters the freedom, which had been withheld from them, and so, as slaves have always done, it was the older women of the family and the community who enforced discipline," says Mrs. Pandit, in the course of a 'heart-to-heart' talk to her sisters. Here, mind you again, she is not against older women in their individual capacities; she, on the contrary, loved them in her own family the most and had all possible regard for them. What she hates is the *system* whereby the younger generations

are kept under ruthless subordination to the older men and women, and the erroneous philosophy of life which has evolved this faulty *system*.

## **Eve and the Social Order**

When at the expiry of her term of 4 months' simple imprisonment, suffered in connection with Mahatma Gandhi's symbolic satyagraha movement, she was released from the Naini Jail, a kind of political stalemate had set in the country, and she therefore devoted herself more and more to the problems concerning women.

In December, 1941, she was elected the President of the women's conference of that year. The World War II was at that time going on in full swings and the forces of aggression had enveloped the entire globe. In conformity with the needs of the time she, therefore, in her presidential address dealt at length with the fast-moving forces of life, and the woman's role in the current social order.

Rising up amidst applause and cheers she began thus :

“ Friends !

“ I am glad to be in your midst today, and I am deeply conscious of the honour you have done me in electing me your president. My thanks, however, will be better shown through any service I may be able to render during the coming year, and if I am able to translate into action even a few of the ideas and ideals I have for this organisation, then the fact that I have not thanked you formally today will not matter.

“ The world moves so rapidly these days that already last year seems a century old. New problems arise before old ones have been solved—new doubts create conflict in our minds and a heaviness in our hearts—leaving us weary. The problems of our own country loom large before us, but larger and more threatening are those world problems which we, as women, have to face. The war rages unabated and draws nearer to our country. Suffering and sorrow go through the world hand in hand leaving desolation in countless homes in many countries. Let us spare a moment to send a word of sympathy and greetings to all those people whose countries



are today involved in war.

“ For several years now our Conference has passed resolutions expressing its opinion against war as a method of solving international problems. At each session we have spoken in eloquent terms of the necessity for a united front by the women of India in condemning the forces of aggression. Unfortunately, however, our resolutions have not gone very far beyond the hall in which they were passed nor has there been perhaps an adequate understanding on the part of the majority of our sisters of the implications of our anti-war resolutions. We have been far away from the horrors of war and it is not always easy to understand an issue, however vital, which does not concern one directly. The situation has, however, changed during the last year and today the possibility of war is nearer to India than ever before. From what angle are we going to approach the problem at this session of our Conference? I realise that I am treading on perilous ground when I put this question to you ; nevertheless I believe we cannot ignore a question just because it is difficult. I would like you

to think of this and give an answer in language which will leave no doubt as to what the women of India want. My own views on this subject are known, I do not wish to inflict them on you, but I do desire, most earnestly, that the Conference should think of this question, not in narrow terms, but with a real understanding of the vital issues involved and with a knowledge of the background which has made such chaos possible in a so-called civilised world. Wars do not come upon one unawares. *They are the inevitable consequences of certain policies. A war is the result of certain economic and other causes. So long as governments persist in such policies so long will wars, with all the tragedy they involve, recur from time to time.*

“In the West our sisters are thinking deeply over these problems. Progressive organisations are trying to find a better way of adjusting human and national relations in the post-war world. The great forces arising in the world today will ultimately help to shape the new world order in which women should take their share, and for this it is necessary to know how we shall approach the

problem. Unless we can define our attitude today it will not be possible to share in the task of building up tomorrow. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, in a statement issued a few months ago, has re-affirmed its belief as follows: '*War is a crime developing a vicious circle in which violence begets violence and reprisals*'. It has declared itself in favour of a world order based on a '*new attitude of man to man and nation to nation with a realisation of interdependence and a renunciation of exploitation and profiteering*.' But declarations to be effective must be implemented by action. The establishment of world peace by the ending of national wars depends on the removal of the causes of wars. They can only be rooted out by the ending of the domination of one country by another and the exploitation of one people by another. Women's organisations should throw all their weight in favour of world disarmament and peacefully labour for the establishment of a juster political and economic order."

Referring to the creed of non-violence and its importance in a war-torn world, she

said, "I have been a member of the Women's League for Peace and Freedom for several years. I have also the honour to belong to the Indian National Congress whose official creed is non-violence. In spite of the criticism and ridicule which has been directed at the non-violent creed, there is an increasing number of thinking men and women all over the world who believe that if the world is not to destroy itself and revert to barbarism it must ultimately accept the principle of non-violence. As women we have a special responsibility cast on us. We must decide whether we shall ally ourselves to the forces of life, or those of death. Are we going to join the group that by their acquiescence make wars possible? *Shall we bear sons only that they may murder other women's sons and help to maintain a system which stands self-condemned?* Or shall we raise our united voice in favour of a brave new world where human life and human liberty receive the respect which is their due, where progress and security are within the grasp of each individual? The choice is before us. The future, not for women only but for humanity

as well, is what the women of today make of it. Let us not treat this matter lightly."

Turning her attention to the political situation in India *vis-a-vis* the world politics, she observed, "While Britain fights for democracy and the liberties of small nations, freedom is denied to India. The people of India have declared their opposition to the fascist nations and their sympathy with the progressive forces of the world, but how can there be any real co-operation except on terms of equality? The authoritative nature of British rule in India contradicts Britain's announcements about her war aims. *Unless the right of India to freedom is recognised how can the people of India fight to preserve the freedom of other nations?* Unless it is recognised that the new world must be built up on the co-operation of a free people in a free world order what ultimate good can come of a victory even by the so-called progressive powers? These are the questions which face us. Indeed the whole world seems to have become one gigantic question mark which challenges us to find an answer."

Exhorting the women to free themselves from the shackles of meaningless customs and party politics and to come out into the sunshine of a broader and healthier existence with wider social interests, she said, "a much greater effort has to be made to widen our scope still further and to join forces with other progressive organisations which work for women. Our outlook, too, must become wider and, though I do not wish the Conference to become involved in party politics, I do believe the days are of political thought. Politics today have become part of our daily life, and we have to choose between narrow party politics and those larger issues of nationalism which face us."

She was not unconscious of the problems specifically pertaining to women but she would not dissociate them from the bigger social and political problems of the country at large.

"We must not," she said, "ourselves be sidetracked by things which seem important but which are, after all, only a part of the bigger issue. Any piecemeal solutions can be nothing more than a patchwork, but a solu-

tion of the basic issues will automatically solve all our smaller problems. We should, I think, ally our Conference with all those progressive movements in India which work for liberty of the individual as well as the liberty of the country. Similar ideas have, I know, been expressed in the Conference before. I reiterate them because I feel it is important for us to face these questions boldly now and give a clear lead to the women of our country, if we wish the Conference to be a vital force.

“ I have the privilege of contacts with women of various groups. Many of them have expressed their inability to work with us on two grounds, first, because they consider our outlook restricted, and secondly, because they felt that too much emphasis was being laid on the problems of women and not enough on those difficulties which woman faces as a human being. There is some truth in these charges. *Today woman faces the world as an individual for the first time. Her problems are the problems of society, and while fighting for those legal, civic and economic rights, which are still denied to us, let us not forget that the whole question of rights for*

*women is closely linked up with the social question which, in its turn, is part of the larger political question.* Unless we approach our work from this view-point the majority of women will not be in a position to take advantage of any increased opportunities which may be offered to them.

Emphasising the need of co-ordination amongst various women's organisations she observed: "I believe in co-ordination. We have at present a number of organisations which are working for women in India. There is the work that is done with sometimes quite unnecessary opposition and jealousy. Our country is big enough for a number of organisations having similar aims to function side by side amicably and in best interests of women. But unless there is some co-ordination of activity progress must be delayed and slow. We have lost much time already; we cannot afford further delays without seriously risking our future. I would like to see a co-ordination of all women's organisations under some federal scheme. It should not matter if the work done by different groups is on different lines or if the same pro-



blem is approached from different angles according to local needs. I realise this is not an easy task but it would bring about better results in the work and create a closer bond between the women of our country.

“It was no use attempting to solve too many problems simultaneously and leaving them all half done. Mere paper work too was not needed.

“In the past we have been in the habit of passing a number of resolutions. We have tried to deal with many questions and although we have achieved a degree of success in several matters, many things necessarily have progressed slowly. I have always thought that if we could deal with one or two problems each year we could forge ahead far more rapidly. I shall therefore venture to suggest once again that instead of endeavouring to tackle a variety of problems we should concentrate this year on those which are of special significance and see to what extent we are able to work them out. The report of our annual session would perhaps be a less imposing document minus the resolutions which add to its bulk, but I feel cer-

tain we could achieve more.” Enumerating the various problems to be tackled by the women of India, she said, “A mass drive against illiteracy started by the Conference would instantly invoke a response from other progressive groups and would help us to establish closer contacts with the villages and with the workers in fields and factories. This would also be a means of educating women in the ideals of the Conference and developing in them a sense of their own responsibilities.

“Then, we have before us a scheme for a model village. The idea is good but there are many difficulties which will have to be faced. Such a project requires the undivided attention of those who take it up. For good work we require trained whole-time workers who will live in the village. I am not sure, however, if even then we can do anything of real value. The main problem of the village is one which the villager must solve himself, through a desire for better conditions. We can of course help to arouse consciousness. In the village project besides literacy, medical aid, etc., which will naturally form

part of any such scheme ; I would like the question of cottage industries and co-operatives to receive the attention which is their due. Their importance cannot be stressed too strongly. For an agricultural country the cottage industry becomes a vital necessity—not as the rival of big industry but as a supplementary force which can help to solve the economic problem of the villager. The work done by co-operatives in China has shown how valuable their contribution can be to the national life of a country. We should therefore remember these two items when working our village project.

“ This Conference has already expressed its views on the recommendations of the Hindu Law Committee. While we have appreciated the recommendations and are glad that the work of codifying the law of succession has been taken up we must not forget that piecemeal legislation is of little value and what is urgently required is the codification of the whole of Hindu Law based on the principles of equality of status between man and woman.

“ And lastly may I appeal to you, my

friends, to do your bit to remove the hatred and suspicion which have crept into our midst. We have been conscious of this unhappy state of affairs and our provincial branches have discussed the question from various points of view, but we have not done anything to create a better atmosphere. An organised effort on behalf of the Conference to restore harmony between the communities will, I am sure, have far-reaching results.

*“India belongs to all of us. Her greatness is the result of that culture to which each sect and religion has contributed. Her past glory as well as her present fallen condition are the handiwork of her children. We cannot evade our responsibility by pleading other activities. Some of the work we have done may have value, but if we can contribute even in a small measure to the unity of India we shall not have lived in vain.”*

## On East and West

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, in her self, combines all that is best in the two ways of life—the Eastern and the Western. One finds in her person the ‘red enamel caste mark’ on her forehead and the ‘scarlet lacquered finger and toe nails’, pleasantly harmonised into a charming individuality.

Her exterior beams with the manners and etiquettes of Miss Hooper—her European governess,—but her heart throbs with the Kashmiri Brahmin blood of her ancestor, Raj Kaul of revered memory who gained eminence in the court of Farrukh Siar as a scholar of Sanskrit and Persian.

She relishes no doubt the breezy free mode of living of the West and has in her own day-to-day living adopted traits of European life. She won’t mind using a fork and a knife at the dinner table, and instead of folding, may shake hands with a

European visitor. She would shake her head with disgust at the sight of a woman 'rickety and emaciated, wrapped in purdah, walking measured steps behind her 'lord' and would simply pooh-pooh the relationship of 'lord and *dasi*' in matrimony. The purdah, the caste, the perverted form of religion, etc., these are all the lingering traits of an obsolete mode of life and she has no respect for them. These are just relics of barbarism and their days are numbered.

On the other hand, however, she is not unconscious of the dangers of blindly aping the European modes of life, which may or may not fit into our culture.

"Having lost the power of free thought, we have become hypnotised by catch-words from the West, and have fashioned our lives according to them," thus she warns us against a harmful transplantation of inadjustable Western modes of life in the Indian soil, adding "we have our own great heritage, and while combining with it whatever may be of use and value and beauty from the West, the fundamental must be of the East alone."

(Address delivered at J.T.H.S chool, Allahabad, on February 25, 1939.)

East has its own unique contribution to make to the civilizations of the world—the contribution of faith, love and sacrifices which are the very fundamentals of the Eastern Philosophy of life.

But there is a ‘cancer in the heart of the rose’ of which she is painfully conscious.

She once got a chance to pay a visit to Hardwar at the time of the Kumbh Mela. The spectacle of Hindus from every corner of India assembling at a place and the social intercourse which ensued in the ‘babbling’ of various tongues amused her; and the verdure on the banks of the holy Ganges, the transparent flow of the water sheet, and the pleasant hilly climate, refreshed her mind, but she was distressed at the sight of religious demonstrations of the savage days of ‘totem and taboo’—the marching of nude sadhus in procession.

While coming back she heard a Punjabi journalist talking about these Nanga Sadhus

demonstrations, and denouncing them with great vehemence thus :

“ It was the most disgusting sight I have ever seen . . . these great vulgar men marching nude through the streets of Hardwar without any religious motive—just showing themselves off making suggestive gestures, marching in a brazen manner, thwarting the authorities in the knowledge that they were supported by thousands of the ignorant to whom their flaunted nudity was a symbol of sainthood ; and the women—old and young, rich and poor—throwing themselves at the feet of these rascals, fighting with each other, pushing each other in a desperate effort to touch the feet and receive the blessing of these holiest of sadhus ! ”.

It was very wise on her part to have expressed her own reactions to a nasty custom, through the agency of a Punjabi journalist for in India people are most touchy and sentimental with regard to matters concerning religion ; and then if a responsible person of her status forthright condemned the religious ceremonies, people would retort back with a horrible protest. Could we, however, say



that it was a mistaken view? Aren't social evils of the category as described heretofore a stigma on the name of Eastern Civilization or to be more precise, Hindu civilization? It is time we had discarded them—the sooner the better.

## To the Students

*"The boy who goes to college merely to acquire some letters after his name which will help him to get a job, and the girl who desires those same letters so that they may lead her to the marriage market, are both doomed to disappointment."*  
(Address delivered at a school in 1939.)

Her conception of education is singularly same and scientific. For her, just going to school or college is no education, for 'it will not make success out of worthless material'. In her view, true education lies in learning to govern your ownself, in giving your best to the work you do, in learning to live for your country, and, for that matter, for the whole humanity, and in so shaping your conduct and your work as to be able to lay within yourself the foundations of truth, strength and service.

The aim of education, according to her

conception consists in helping you to make the best out of what is in you.

In her inaugural address at the Third Annual Conference of the Agra University Students, held at Cawnpore on January 14, 1939, she deplored that our students have lost all sense of discipline and restraint. Even their patriotism had been, in many instances, wrongly demonstrated, and consequently it weakened their own force as well as that of the cause they wanted to help. She emphasised the necessity of discipline—discipline imposed from within rather than from without—for the students. ‘The world is yours to conquer, not by the force of arms but by the force of your love and service for humanity but for this you must conquer yourselves and go forward with humility, and take your part in creating a better order’ she said while exhorting the young men and women of India to change their, now faulty, attitude to all those fundamentals of life which go to make up a free nation. The conceptions of education, service, and patriotism need be changed. ‘Owing to years of

foreign rule we have come to accept without question a policy of education which was designed to keep us in subjugation.'

In the course of the same address she warned the Indian youth against what may be called 'blind aping of the West', observing that "the training we have received has not taught us to understand life and our share in it, but rather to ape the modes and manners of your rulers. Many of us have still not realized the great harm that the present system of education has done to us. To go to school or college has become a routine for the middle-class girl or boy and no one bothers to think what the result will be; but just going to school or college will not make success out of worthless material."

A fine healthy life for her is not just a happy-go-lucky existence, as most of the students at university centres are prone to believe, but to so shape your conduct and your work as to be able to lay within yourselves the foundations of truth, strength and service, which alone will help, both you and the country, along the road to advancement.

India is in bondage and the great task of freeing her from the shackles of British Imperialism lies upon the shoulders of Indian youth. She reminds the students that enslaved India helps the forces of Imperialism to progress ; whereas a Free India upholds the cause of democracy. *'It is therefore not only for our own liberty we fight but for the liberty of the suppressed people everywhere, and this great responsibility lies on the shoulders of our youth . . . I appeal to you my young friends to fear not the foreign domination in our country but to feel, that you will soon be the citizens of a Free India.'*

This is her message of hope to the youth of the land.

India is in bondage and the great task of freeing her from the shackles of British Imperialism lies upon the shoulders of Indian youth. She reminds the students that enslaved India helps the forces of Imperialism to progress ; whereas a Free India upholds the cause of democracy. *'It is therefore not only for our own liberty we fight but for the liberty of the suppressed people everywhere, and this great responsibility lies on the shoulders of our youth . . . I appeal to you my young friends to fear not the foreign domination in our country but to feel, that you will soon be the citizens of a Free India.'*

This is her message of hope to the youth of the land.

*many good things fate gave me at my birth, one of the best was surely my brother. To have known and loved him, and been so near to him would have been ample justification for having been born."* . . . .

No sister can express the depth of her love for her brother in words more beautiful and feelings more profound than these.

Similarly Jawaharlal's other sister—Mrs. Krishna Hutheesingh—in her reminiscences pines for a reversal of the time span so that she could once again live the moments spent by her in company of her brother and father.

In a charming way she describes her tour in Europe in the company of Jawaharlal in the year 1925. In the course of the tour they visited England, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and Russia. He took his little sister round visiting museums, art galleries, and other places of historical significance, avoiding theatres, etc., and introduced her to the eminent personalities of the age, including the great French writer Romain Rolland, Ernst Toller, Chi-

cherin, the then Russian Foreign Minister, and Einstein, the great scientist. Amongst the functions attended were the meetings of the League against Imperialism held in Brussels, the 10th anniversary celebrations of the Russian Revolution and a huge state banquet at Moscow.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit too has been to Europe and has gathered in her person considerable experience of the international, social and political movements.

This is the background of the intellectual development of Nehru sisters. Below are produced extracts from Jawaharlal's letters to his sisters, which not only give us an insight of the broad vision of this great man of the age but also speak of the affection and care he has for his sisters.

Once perchance he was arrested on a date which was Krishna's birthday when he contemplated sending a present to her. Ruminating over the sad coincidence of events he wrote:

*Jawahar's letter to Krishna on her birthday*

/ "It has recently occurred to me that the



British Government, by issuing an order under Section 144 on me, and by subsequently arresting me on the 19th October, forgot a most important event on that day, and the beautiful and artistic gift that I should have made to my dearly beloved sister, did not materialise—this lapse on my part was most unfortunate. But I hasten to correct it. Wherefore, take yourself to a bookshop and choose some volumes containing wisdom of the ancients, and the faith of the middle age, and the scepticism of the present, and the glimpses of the glory that is to be—(here mark the words ‘the glory that is to be’ and not ‘the glory that was *Ind*’, which is a favourite phrase with the ‘conventional’ thinkers and writers. Jawaharlal is essentially a ‘realist’; instead of the night which has passed, he thinks of the morrow which has yet to dawn, and he is optimistic that it will be bright. The expression in his this letter is remarkably literary. If he weren’t a politician, he would have been as great a man of letters, if not greater!) and take them and pay for them and consider them the belated, but loving gift of a some-

what absent-minded brother, who thinks often of his little sister. And read these chosen volumes, and out of them construct a magic city, full of dreams, castles and flowering gardens and running brooks, where beauty and happiness dwell and the ills that this sorry world of ours suffers from can gain no admittance—and life will then become one long and happy endeavour, a ceaseless adventure to build this city of magic and drive away all the ugliness and misery around us.”

Again on being reminded of the disintegration which overtook the Nehru family, Jawaharlal once wrote :

“ You write of 1928 and of our compact family then. Now many of our beloved ones are dead and the others scattered and isolated, unable even to see each other. That lesson repeated in each generation has to be learnt by each generation through personal experience. *Integration follows disintegration, but each integration is perhaps on a higher level than the previous one, for it carries sub-consciously somewhere the memory of past successes and failures.* The

burden of the past pursues us, and yet it is both a burden and an inspiration, for it drags us down and at the same time pushes us on. Sometimes we feel vital, youthful and full of energy, at other times thousands of years weigh us down and we feel old and a little weary at this long and interminable pilgrimage. Both are part of us and make us what we are, and out of that ceaseless intermingling and conflict something new is always rising.

“ When I was a child I remember our family consisting of twenty persons or more all living together as joint families do. I saw that large family disintegrate and then each part form itself into a nucleus of integration; and yet silken bonds of affection and common interests joined these separate parts and there was always an integration of the large whole. That process continues and normally you would hardly notice it, but when events hasten it there is a shock. Think of what happened in China during the past five years and of the cataclysm that has overwhelmed hundreds of thousands of families, yet the nation lives, more vital than ever,

and individuals are born and grow and carry on the tradition of the race and humanity in spite of the catastrophe. I sometimes feel that we in India would be the better for some such mass experience. Anyway we are having our own experience and thus building up slowly but surely a new Nation."

## **Half-an-Hour in Anand Bhawan**

‘ Ekka-wallah ho ! . . . Come boy ! ’

‘ Yes ! babu jee. ’

‘ Carry me to Anand Bhawan—do you know where it is ? ’

‘ Aji wah babu jee ! in Allahabad who doesn’t know where Anand Bhawan is,’ remarked the poor boy with a smile.

‘ And who lives there—do you know ? ’

‘ Our Pandit Jawaharlalji ’ he quickly replied. His eyes glistened. The very name seemed to have inspired him. With a jump he perched on the seat and the unwieldy structure jolted along a clean black road running zig-zag like a serpent under the green trees.

‘ Our Pandit Jawaharlal . . . our . . . our,’ the words kept on ringing into my ears and I ruminated over the simple sentiments of the ekka-wallah.

In a few minutes I found myself at the gates of Anand Bhawan. I paid the ekkah-wallah off and he flew away in search of another load. I walked up a few paces, gave my card to an elderly man with a snow-white Gandhi cap—a man with an ever-smiling face and welcoming eyes.

‘ Please be seated here ’ he said and went in. I flung myself in one of the cane chairs lying in the verandah. My eyes vaguely roamed about.

I confess I do not believe in any such thing as telepathy or human magnetism but somehow I felt a strange sense of freedom and courage in the four walls of the building.

The atmosphere in and around the Bhawan was grim and the massive pillars of the building stood silent and heavy with the tales of the sufferings of Nehru family in their bosoms. It appeared as if the occupants of this building were, all of them, heart and soul, busy tackling a huge problem—problem of the emancipation of 400 million souls of India from foreign yoke, and will

have no rest until they finish the task set before them. I vividly sensed as if Anand Bhawan was not a residential building but just a halting abode for its owners, who seemed to have decided not to enjoy home life until their motherland is free.

There came a crowd of men, women and children. They were pilgrims from the Madras side and after their morning dip in the holy *Triveni* had come up there to have a view of the famous building wherein the Nehrus, the most loved family of India, live. To them Anand Bhawan was no less sacred than the banks of the holy Ganges. They, all of them, bowed low before the massive structure, had a look round and went away. Nobody interrogated them for trespassing the premises. The building, like its occupants, belongs to the public.

“Why! whom are they bowing to—these people?” asked an American visitor sitting by my side.

“To the building,” I replied.

“Oh! do they?” he exclaimed agap in wonder. He paused in a reflective mood and then muttered “Yes . . . yes . . . East is

East and West is West and the twain shall never meet ”.

All of a sudden Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru appeared in a side wing of the spacious verandah. He had a light brown warm achkan on and walked with a steady leg, and an almost imperceptible scholarly stoop. He greeted a group of college students with a pleasant smile and walked down the stairs near them. One of the visitors standing aside—a young man probably from some Rajputana village—came forth and tried to touch Panditji's feet. “What! what are you doing? . . . give up this sixteenth-century outlook . . . we are in the Atomic age my boy ” . . . said Panditji. And then he suddenly sank in a reflective mood and muttered, ‘I want my people to walk erect and feel free.’ The young man felt a little embarrassed. Panditji humoured him and cheered a bright affectionate send-off to the students.

Then came a small group of journalists who were waiting in the adjacent lawn. Panditji greeted them too with a pleasant grin. They swarmed around him and pressed



him for a 'news' or a 'message'. With a characteristic gesture of his hand Panditji told them that at the moment he had neither of the two. Respectfully they bade 'Namaste' and departed. In the meanwhile some local Congress workers had assembled besides. With respectful greetings they approached Panditji and wanted his guidance in connection with the election campaign and other allied issues concerning the party work. Panditji listened to each one of them attentively and gave specific instructions as he deemed necessary. They all dispersed.

Now it was my turn. "I am afraid I have kept you in long waiting," he said apologetically. "No, not that way Panditji . . . it was rather a pleasure to " . . . He cut short my formality (which I later on realized was unnecessary as Panditji had already admonished a young man for his 'sixteenth-century ways') with a question :

"Are you from the Punjab?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"I love Punjabis—they are vigorous people—really enthusiastic people—I should

say stormy people"—and then he burst into a bright laughter.

I wanted him to give me some intimate details about Sh. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and to observe on her work in the U.S.A. "Oh no! it does not become of a brother to talk about his own sister that way," he said. He evaded the issue but his eyes were betraying that he wanted to say "yes! I am proud of my sister's timely services to India." I asked him to comment on the present political situation and again he successfully avoided the matter. He looked at his watch—"no time—no time—, I have to attend to so many urgent issues, and then I should leave tonight for Delhi . . . headache, Oh! headache," he murmured and thereafter wished me good-bye and began to talk with the other candidate.

He was restless—restless for the deliverance of 400 million souls now in bondage. While he was fidgeting about in the premises of Anand Bhawan, Jinnah—the Barrister—was dreaming of the 'Heavenly manna' of Pakistan in his velvety couches; just then hundreds of rickshaw coolies were, even in the

bazars of Allahabad, crawling along the roads with human cargoes behind them, lacs of poor people were tottering on the verge of starvation and death in the streets of Calcutta ; in front of the massive gates of the Red Fort, suppressed angry mobs were crying for the release of I.N.A. prisoners ; just then in the Police Training Centres of India, *Jawans* of Jhelum were being trained in *lathi-charge* and ' open fire ' ; just then a gallant Prince in a neighbouring State was busy buying racehorses and elephants for his stables, and the massive walls of the Viceregal Lodge were echoing to the tune of a cocktail dance.

---



